System

The Saint Laurents

Issue No. 20 – £26 / €32

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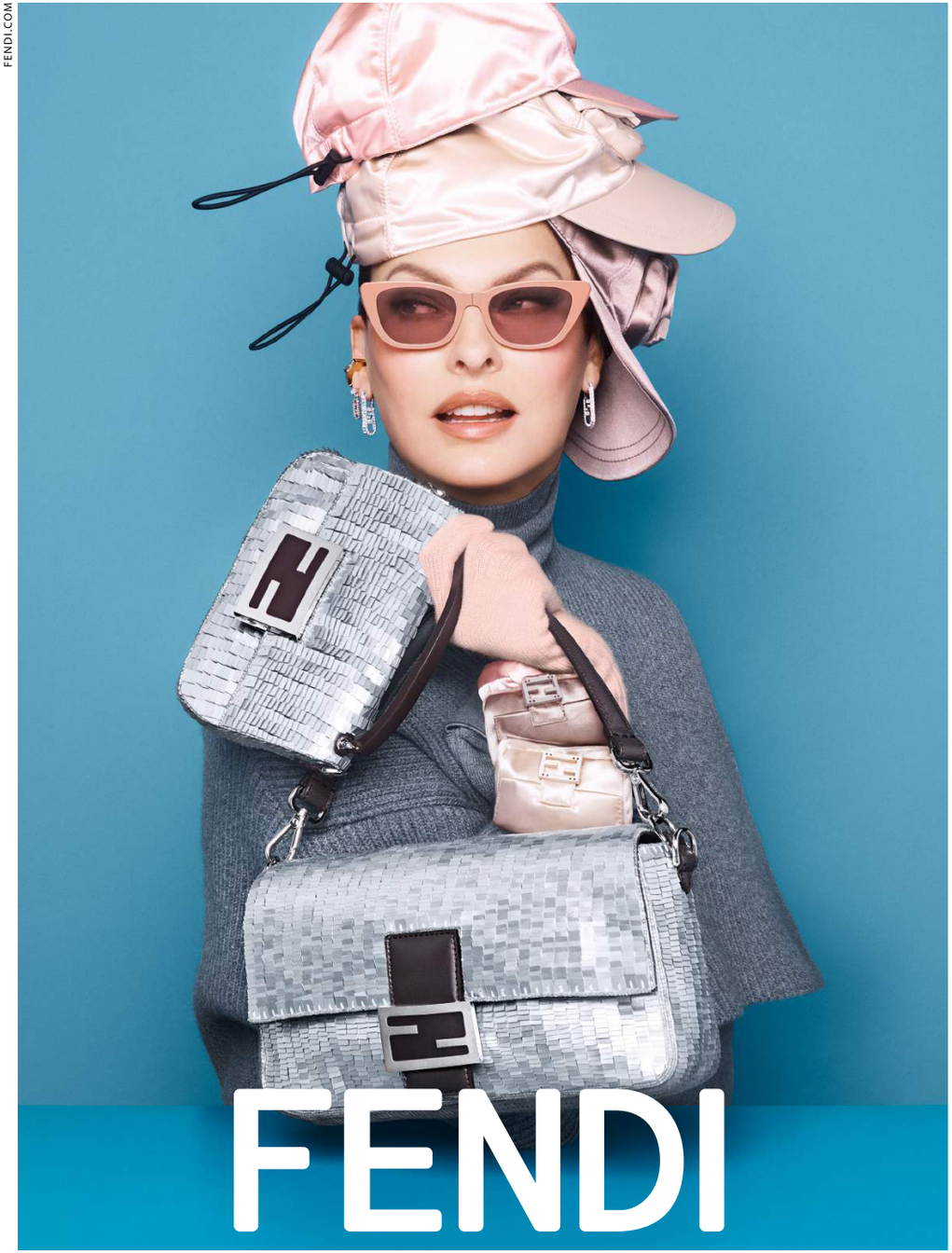

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HAIDER +FILA

'We are here as custodians,' says Saint Laurent CEO and cover star, Francesca Bellettini. In a wide-ranging conversation (p.40), she and creative director Anthony Vaccarello discuss their respective paths towards the hallowed Parisian house and the €3 billion success story they're making there. 'The brand will survive us all,' says Bellettini, which, she believes, gives her and Vaccarello a duty to keep the house in order, prepare the terrain for the next generation, and maintain YSL standards.

There is something both levelling and reassuring in recognizing that we are all but transient guardians of grander schemes, wider stories, bigger issues. Martine Rose, interviewed for this issue with her long-time stylist and best friend Tamara Rothstein (p.78), presents herself as much as a guardian of London's (sub)cultural melting pot as she does a menswear designer. Eschewing collection mood boards in favour of lived experiences, often those of her family and friends in the nightlife of the British capital, she has carved out a pleasantly idiosyncratic niche for herself in the industry, defined by its keen sense of time, place and behaviour – fashion as psychogeography. Meanwhile, over in Tokyo, in a rare interview to mark the 30th anniversary of his label (p.176), Junya Watanabe reflects on the notion of ploughing his own furrow to keep punk aesthetics and the art of tailoring alive, motivated by the higher purpose of 'digging into one small theme and making it stronger', season after season.

And lastly, Haider Ackermann. 'I am an adopted child,' he says in a candid interview about his recent absence from the industry (p.230). 'My name is the only thing I carry from my parents.' Reclaiming his right to use it has proved a trial of late, but with the legal dispute successfully resolved, he's making up for lost time, juggling sportswear and couture collections, and plotting the return of his eponymous brand. 'I always used to say to people, dream your dreams and follow your heart,' he adds, 'but time has taught me that you also need to protect your future.'

‘We’re the custodians of the house.’

Saint Laurent CEO Francesca Bellettini and creative director Anthony Vaccarello on their ‘never compromise the brand’ strategy.

Interview by Jonathan Wingfield
Photographs and layout by Juergen Teller; creative partner Dovile Drizyte

Against an economic backdrop of post-pandemic uncertainty, one thing feels reliably certain: luxury fashion just keeps growing. Of course, in today's topsy-turvy swings-and-roundabouts industry, some hallowed houses always seem to be faring better than others, with hype, resilience and double-digit growth as common for some as scandal, musical chairs-like personnel changes and sluggish sales are for others.

For Saint Laurent though, the company's strategy of taking 'evolution not revolution' to scale has made it the stealth success story of the moment. Revenue in the first half of 2022 was up 42%, with projections for the total year looking on track to surpass €3 billion. Meanwhile, the brand's parent group Kering reported last June that it aims to break €5 billion revenue by 2026.

caught up with Bellettini and Vaccarello in his office in the Saint Laurent Paris HQ (situated, of course, Rive Gauche) to discuss their respective paths to success and why, sometimes, it's best to ignore the billions.

At school, were you a straight-A student, a rebel or a slacker?

Francesca Bellettini: I was a good student and got good grades, but I also wanted to go out and have fun – I grew up in Emilia-Romagna, a region of Italy with lots of distractions. I was the one in class sharing my homework around, making sure everyone would pass, which probably says a lot about my character.

Anthony Vaccarello: At my school in Brussels, I was with the bad guys at the back of the class. We were always able to strike a deal with the one or two good

into La Cambre [fashion school], discovered something I really loved doing, and everything changed for me.

Growing up, what was your rapport with luxury consumerism?

Francesca: My family didn't consume luxury, but being Italian meant that we grew up aware of things like quality furniture and design. It was never a given that we'd spend money on fashion, but we still valued looking nice. I remember my mum taking me and my two sisters to the local seamstress with pictures of looks from [fashion] shows, and asking her to make them for us.

Anthony: I was always attracted to fashion and luxury, even though it was never part of my family. I worked at weekends and during the holidays to be able to buy myself things from Dior

'Helmut Lang taught me very early in my career that creating something that cannot be sold is the ultimate luxury in fashion.'

While business analysts are quick to highlight category-led collections and healthily geo-diversified retail expansion as the key driving factors for the growth, the duo behind the momentum, Saint Laurent CEO Francesca Bellettini and creative director Anthony Vaccarello, prefer to follow a strict, no-nonsense mantra: 'Never ever compromise the brand.' Which, when you have a name as alluring and storied as Saint Laurent, would seem like common sense.

Since joining the house in 2016, Vaccarello's razor-sharp collections have put the tailoring and super-sexy front and centre, while mythologizing the Paris of Yves Saint Laurent, and re-establishing the iconic Cassandre-designed YSL logo as *the* symbol for 'chic with a hint of scandal'. *System*

students – the ones like Francesca! – who would agree to hand over their homework. I was always good at art but during my high-school years studies were more focused on Latin and mathematics. I was always interested in fashion, music and cinema, but I never imagined that I could do that as a job. When I was 18, I began studying to become a lawyer because that represented a 'normal' job.

Was there a moment of epiphany when you said, I have to pursue fashion?

Anthony: Yes, when I realized how much you have to study to become a lawyer! I remember thinking, 'This is nothing like *Ally McBeal*.' [Laughs] My parents saw me getting pretty depressed about the situation, and they said I should do what made me happy. I got

Homme. I was the only one at school dressed like that.

One-time Louis Vuitton CEO Yves Carcelle told me he was a natural-born entrepreneur, already selling marbles at school. What about you, Francesca?

Francesca: I'm more a natural-born manager than an entrepreneur. That started with my father who was an accountant; I loved going with him to his office, where he'd teach me how to write invoices. He would give me the out-of-date invoicing booklets and a stamp, and aged eight or so I'd spend my afternoons 'selling' everything in my bedroom! I had my little fake phone and my imaginary customers who I'd call up to say, 'I sold you my lamp yesterday, and now I'm sending the invoice and you have pay me.'

Having started your career in investment banking in London, was entering the fashion industry something of a culture shock?

Francesca: During my last two and a half years in investment banking I actually specialized in the fashion and luxury industry. That's how I met Patrizio Bertelli at Prada, who brought me into fashion and offered me a job. Investment banking for me was more about consulting, and when I moved into the fashion industry itself I quickly realized that giving advice is relatively easy, but the people running these companies are experiencing everyday problems that you can never identify as a consultant. My first reaction was to call my old clients and apologize for how I had made my advice sound so easy to put into practice!

was the Bernhard Willhelm era – the complete opposite of what I was doing at the time, which was way more Tom Ford.' Was Tom Ford's influence on you purely stylistic?

Anthony: Everyone was into Bernhard Willhelm, Martin Margiela and Ann Demeulemeester, who of course I respected, too, but I was less drawn to that aesthetic. At La Cambre, the Belgian and Japanese designers were considered more art than luxury, although luxury wasn't even a word we used – that felt more French, more Saint Laurent or Chanel. As for Tom Ford, other students thought his name was almost like an insult, but I found his collections – in particular his use of black and leather – far more appealing. Maybe because my parents were Italian, so I always had this Italian and Belgian duality in me, some-

Francesca: Marco is confident in his own skin so has never been afraid to hire people who are better than him in specific roles, because he understands you cannot pretend to know everything. I experienced this management style first hand and he gave me the space to be myself, and to be noticed by others – including François-Henri Pinault. By managing me, he was allowing me to be better. It was an important lesson, and when I became CEO here, I wanted to adopt a similar approach. Three industry CEOs – Emmanuel Gintzburger, who's at Versace, Cédric Charbit [at Balenciaga] and Leo Rongone [Bottega Veneta] – were all previously part of our management team at Saint Laurent. They are incredibly talented, and I was lucky to have them on the team, but I was also happy to help them grow and

'The other students in my class at fashion school thought the name Tom Ford was almost an insult, but I found his collections far more appealing.'

Tell me about early experiences with colleagues who were purely creative.

Francesca: The first was Helmut Lang. It was fascinating to see close up how he embodied the essence of creativity, so far removed from marketing-led consumer products. I remember one time Helmut had cancelled a dress from his collection before it went into market, but then he later put that same dress in the campaign. I was freaking out, so I called him and said, 'Look, there's a dress in the campaign that we're not even selling', and he said, 'Creating something that cannot be sold is the ultimate luxury.' He taught me early in my career that in luxury the most important thing is to create desire.

Anthony, you've said that when you were at La Cambre fashion school, 'it

thing sexual and seductive while still being 'real' clothing. Around that time, in 2001 or 2002, Tom was a total visionary, in the way he linked designing collections with creating imagery and marketing products.

Francesca: I joined Gucci around that time, and I remember being excited to see Tom Ford working, even though it was from a distance. As Anthony says, he and Domenico [De Sole] created a new way of working in fashion, between design and merchandising, and all driven through image. What they did at Gucci has obviously informed so many other brands since then.

Francesca, you worked for [current Gucci CEO] Marco Bizzarri at Bottega Veneta. What did you learn from his style of management?

to give them the possibility to be seen by others.

Francesca, you joined Saint Laurent almost ten years ago, when Pierre Bergé was still alive. Tell me about your experiences meeting with him.

Francesca: Pierre was always very sincere and said exactly what he thought, which I really appreciated, because I am the same. He'd call me to say he'd spoken to the press about how proud he was of what was happening at Saint Laurent; he'd also call me about things he didn't like. We had a very normal and open dialogue. When Anthony was appointed as creative director, Pierre was really happy because Anthony had previously won the ANDAM award that he had created in Paris for new designers. He'd already

seen Anthony's talent for himself, and he told me, 'You did right.'

Anthony, did you speak with Pierre Bergé at the time?
Anthony: Yes. After I was appointed at Saint Laurent, we'd have lunch together once a month at a small Japanese restaurant near Avenue Montaigne. I was always impressed by him. He was known to be pretty difficult with people he didn't initially take to, but he was always very kind and supportive of me. Having the blessing of the person who created the house alongside Yves Saint Laurent obviously meant a lot.
Francesca: Pierre was very ill at the time Anthony did his first ready-to-wear show for Saint Laurent, but he still made the effort to come and support him, which I think says a lot.

'For me, this is not a job. I don't wake up and think, 'Oh, I have to go to the studio'; I live and breathe it every day. When I stop, I get sick.'

Francesca, what was your impression of the company when François-Henri Pinault asked you to take over in 2013?
Francesca: It was immediately apparent that the brand was nowhere near the potential of the brand name. People had been working too much on the business side and not enough on the brand and the brand positioning. I focused on what I know best – business and organization – to identify with the team which quick adjustments we could make, while getting the people in the regions to start reporting directly to me. With François-Henri, we took the decision to keep investing in Saint Laurent and take it to the next level, with a focus on protecting the brand. The reality is that when Anthony joined in 2016, the company needed him in order to get to that next level, and to do so, it had to change significantly as a brand and an organization. I knew Anthony could lead that. Ultimately, we've been able to improve the company's overall quality, positioning and image because Anthony has pulled us in the right direction. When we first met, the two of us discussed what we felt was right for the company, and it was the same thing – growing the business, of course, but always protecting the image, and never following others. People sometimes think the only way to grow is to do the same things as everyone else – sportswear, collaborations…
Anthony: I hate all that stuff, and I'm really proud of the fact we've avoided doing what other brands seem to be attracted to, simply because it's considered cool or might unlock rapid growth. There's absolutely no desire for us to compromise the inimitable name of Yves Saint Laurent.
Francesca: We are here as custodians, and we know that this brand will survive all of us. And I hope when people talk about this period in the house's history, they talk about the part it's played in the overall brand legacy, and not just about profitability.

Francesca, how has your role evolved now that Saint Laurent is reaching the €3 billion turnover mark?
Francesca: I honestly try not to feel the pressure of the size or the number of people, and I try to keep the pressure off everyone else from feeling this, too. If you thought too much about the 5,000 employees and their families who depend on you, you'd end up never taking the risks that you need to take.
Anthony: I'm the same. The last thing I want to be thinking about when I'm creating the collections is the billions associated with the brand's sales. If I did, I'd end up designing counterintuitively. I'm happy to continue working just like I did when I first joined.

This might seem like an absurd question to ask a CEO, but is there a time when big becomes too big? When could Saint Laurent's scale have an adverse effect on the value of the brand?
Francesca: It all goes with the positioning and the image of the brand. The interest around the Saint Laurent brand is immense, but looking at other brands, you can see which are huge – certainly bigger than us – but remain true to who they are. Then there are those that have reached certain sizes but compromised their core values. They are the ones that fall, and they're the ones I look at to understand what we should be avoiding.
Anthony: Timing is so important in these things. For example, it will be my first men's show in Paris in January. It took me six years to get here but I think now is the right moment.
Francesca: There was no need, from a business standpoint, for me to go to Anthony and say, please, let's do a men's show. It happened organically, and with this first men's show now comes the ideal moment to push our menswear more.
Anthony: The best thing about working with Francesca is that we really understand one another.
Francesca: We talk a lot; we exchange a lot. Whenever I've had to take any important business decisions, Anthony is the one person I really talk to and who I trust, because I know he'll always tell me the truth. We're in this together.

With still so much industry-wide emphasis on the Chinese market, what do you think draws Chinese consumers to Saint Laurent?
Francesca: The fact that we don't change who we are when we go into a market allows us to make ourselves understood wherever we are. It's fundamental to our 'never compromise' strategy. I always say when we go into a market that we never localize but we do contextualize. That means I explain to you who I am in a way that you can understand – but I don't change who I am. Today's consumer is international and I find it disrespectful to a local market to go in and do things differently because you think they're different. It is not true. Our Chinese customers are no different to our Western customers. Everybody thinks that China is the market for accessories – but our Chinese stores are those selling the highest share of ready-to-wear.

Francesca, you headed up the merchandising department at Gucci and later Bottega Veneta before joining Saint Laurent. What does the merchandising scenario look like here?
Francesca: The merchandising role is different in each company, because it has to adapt to the creative director you have. It is a function at the centre of the company, and its most important role is to forge a link between the creativity of the company and its peripheral production – the development, the deliveries, the stores. Anthony has had his own brand in the past and knows exactly how a collection needs to be built, so he doesn't need exterior consultants to come in and tell him what the collection plan format and product range should look like. That's nonsense. The moment you come into the luxury industry and try to work by format, you're done for. It won't work. We structure the merchandising so it can deliver Anthony's vision into the regions in the most faithful ways. We're not a brand that has a crazy fashion show and then a completely different product selection for the stores.
Anthony: That's the beauty of this house. There's no commercial spin-off between what's in the shows and what's in the stores. I design the collections with every category in mind – knitwear, sweaters, dresses – because I like to see those pieces in the street, worn by everyone. It's not like I only do transparent dresses or mini dresses; it's 360 degrees.
Francesca: That's why today's creative directors need to know much more about merchandising than they did in the past. They're in charge of the entire brand image, not just designing the collection, which is why Anthony is constantly thinking about the stores, the collections, the images, the communications – it's a complete vision.

Yves Saint Laurent started as a couture house. What are your thoughts on couture and the house today?
Anthony: It's obviously really hard to do couture here because it was so linked to Yves Saint Laurent himself. Of course, I want to do it, but I want to do it well, and I have to feel it's the right moment to extend that part of the brand, like with the men's show. For me, couture is something I am already doing in the ready-to-wear, in the way some of the pieces are constructed.
Francesca: We actually still have some people working in the company who worked with Yves Saint Laurent.

How much is a house's identity and success today tied to a designer's presence and personality?
Francesca: One hundred percent. That is why you have to be able to choose the person who is right for the house. It is not true that one designer fits all. The worst thing is when you try to force someone who has an aesthetic that has nothing to do with the positioning of the brand. And it is very important that the creative director has a genuine love for the brand; otherwise it won't last. It'll just be a big revolution followed by rebuilding everything up again. As Anthony often says, he feels like he is creating for himself when he is creating for Saint Laurent. It's a natural match.

Francesca, it feels depressing to have to ask this, but nonetheless important – you're practically the only female CEO of a major fashion house. Why?
Francesca: Honestly, I think that question should be asked to the people who still have a problem with it. I have always been very lucky in my life because I never felt being a woman was a disadvantage; on the contrary, I always felt it was a plus. In my family, I had two sisters, and I was never told I couldn't run a company. So that has always been the way I lead my life. I was lucky to have this vision and then to join a group like Kering, where François-Henri Pinault puts talent first and promotes gender equality. I hope we can be an example for other successful female CEOs.

Francesca, this is maybe a tough question because he is sitting next to you, but what is Anthony's biggest flaw?
Francesca: That's easy. He never stops working! I go on holiday; he never does.
Anthony: But for me, this is not a job. I don't wake up and think, 'Oh, I have to go to the studio'; I live and breathe it every day. I'm very lucky.

Your partner in life also works in the Saint Laurent studio. Does the work conversation continue when you both go home or is there some distance?
Anthony: It never stops – and I don't want it to stop. When I stop, I get sick.

And Anthony, what is Francesca's biggest flaw?
Anthony: Same thing; she never stops!

Chic, NO ?

After every season Anthony and I look at each other and say chic, NO ?..
and we carry on

Juergen Teller

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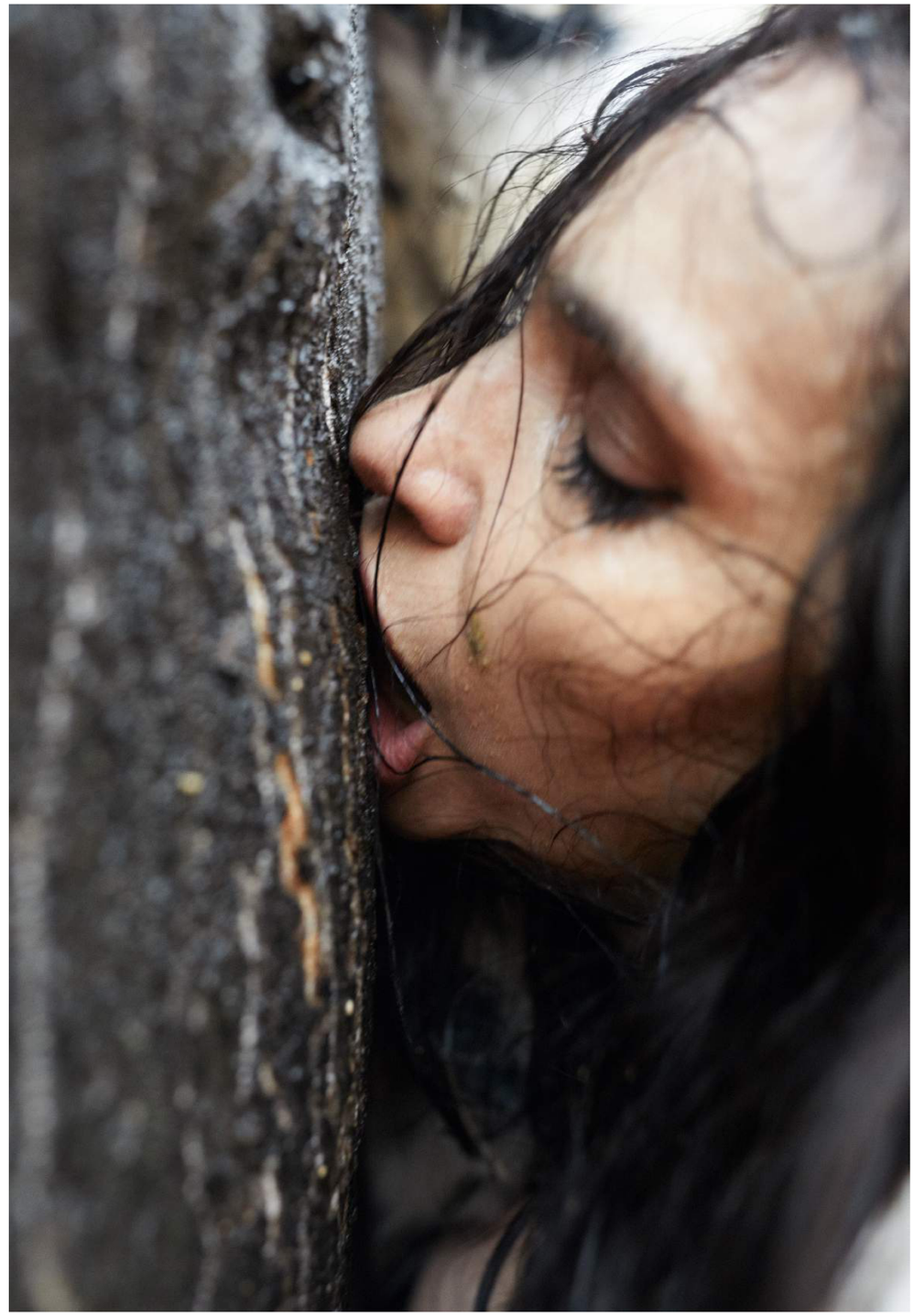

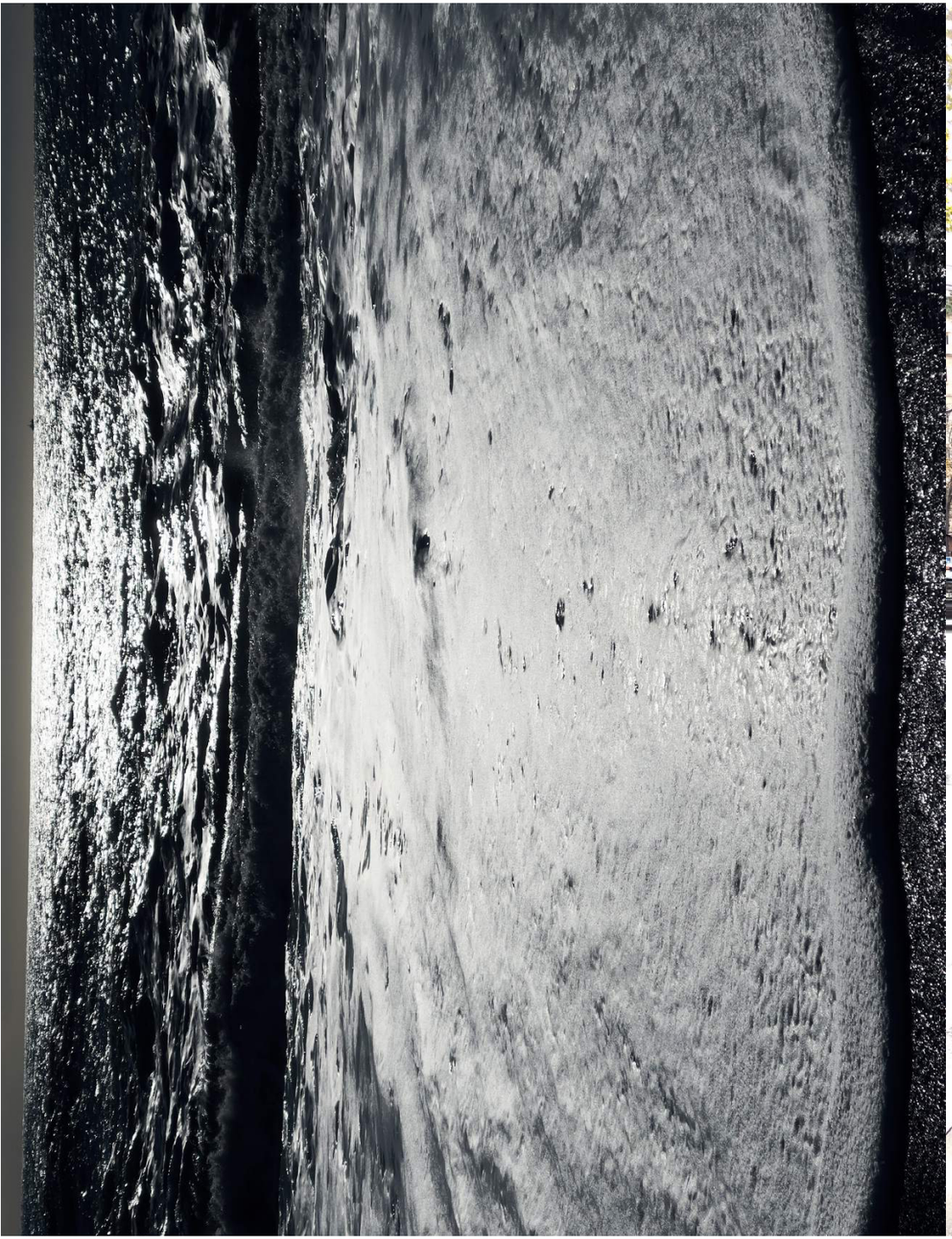

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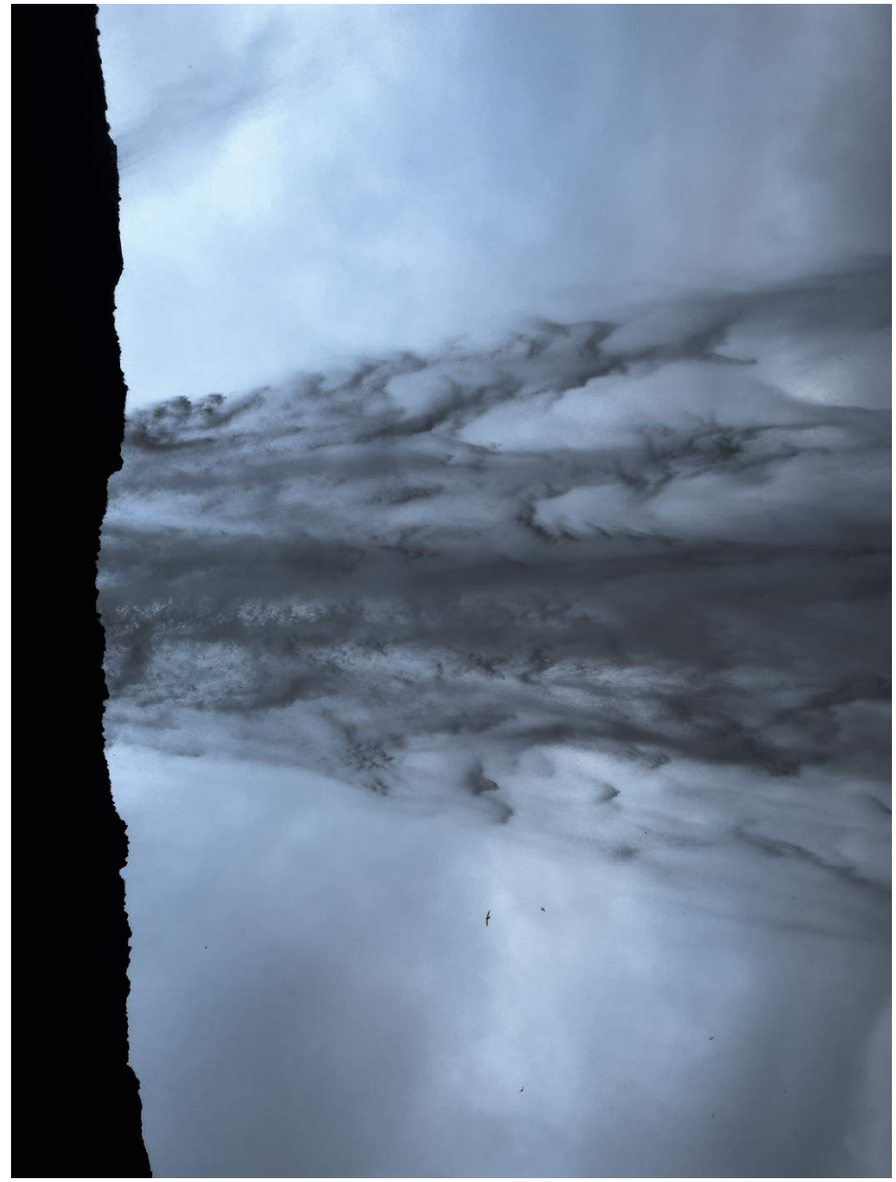

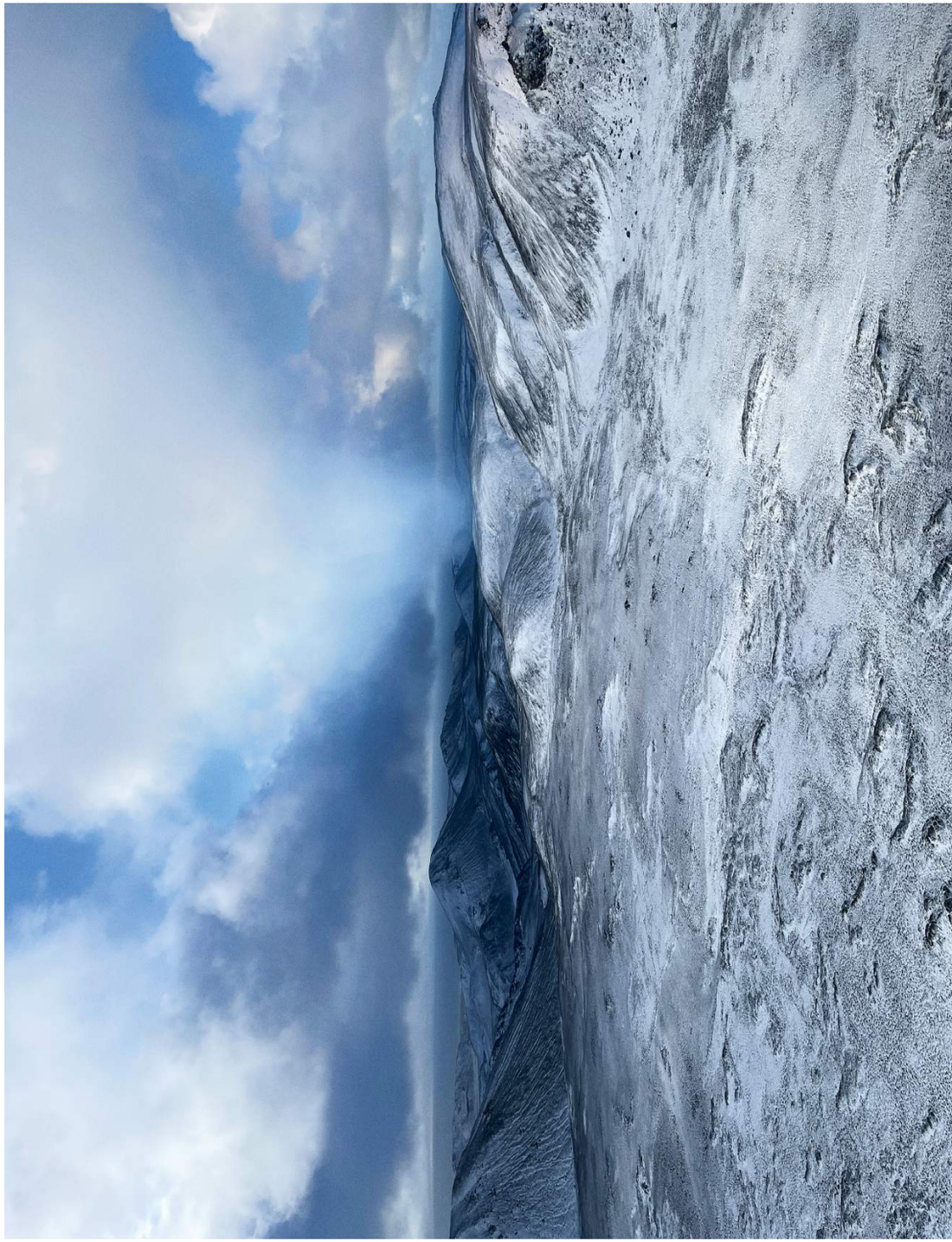

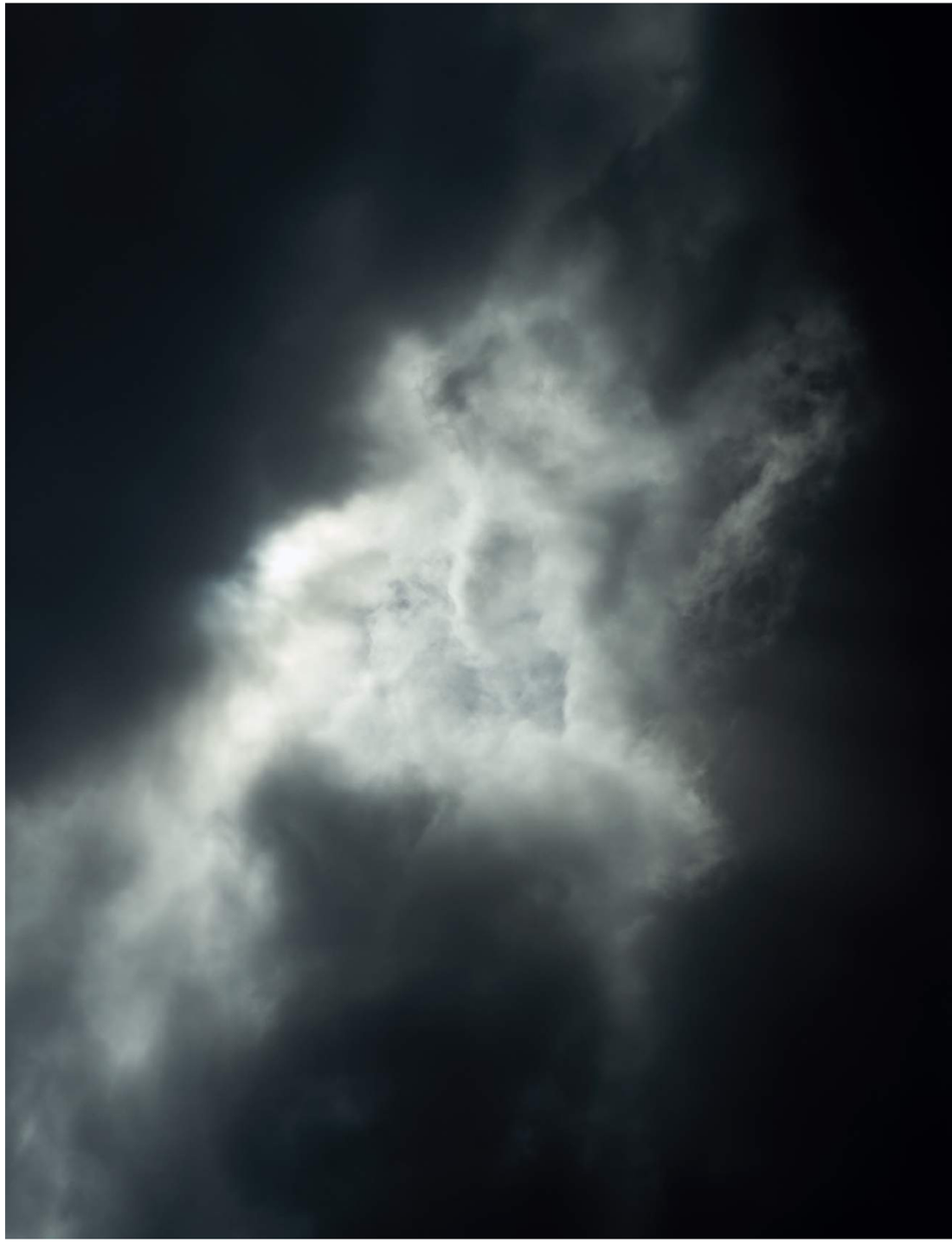

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One print lover's mission to assemble the world's largest fashion library. By Elise By Olsen. Photograph by Guillaume Blondiau.

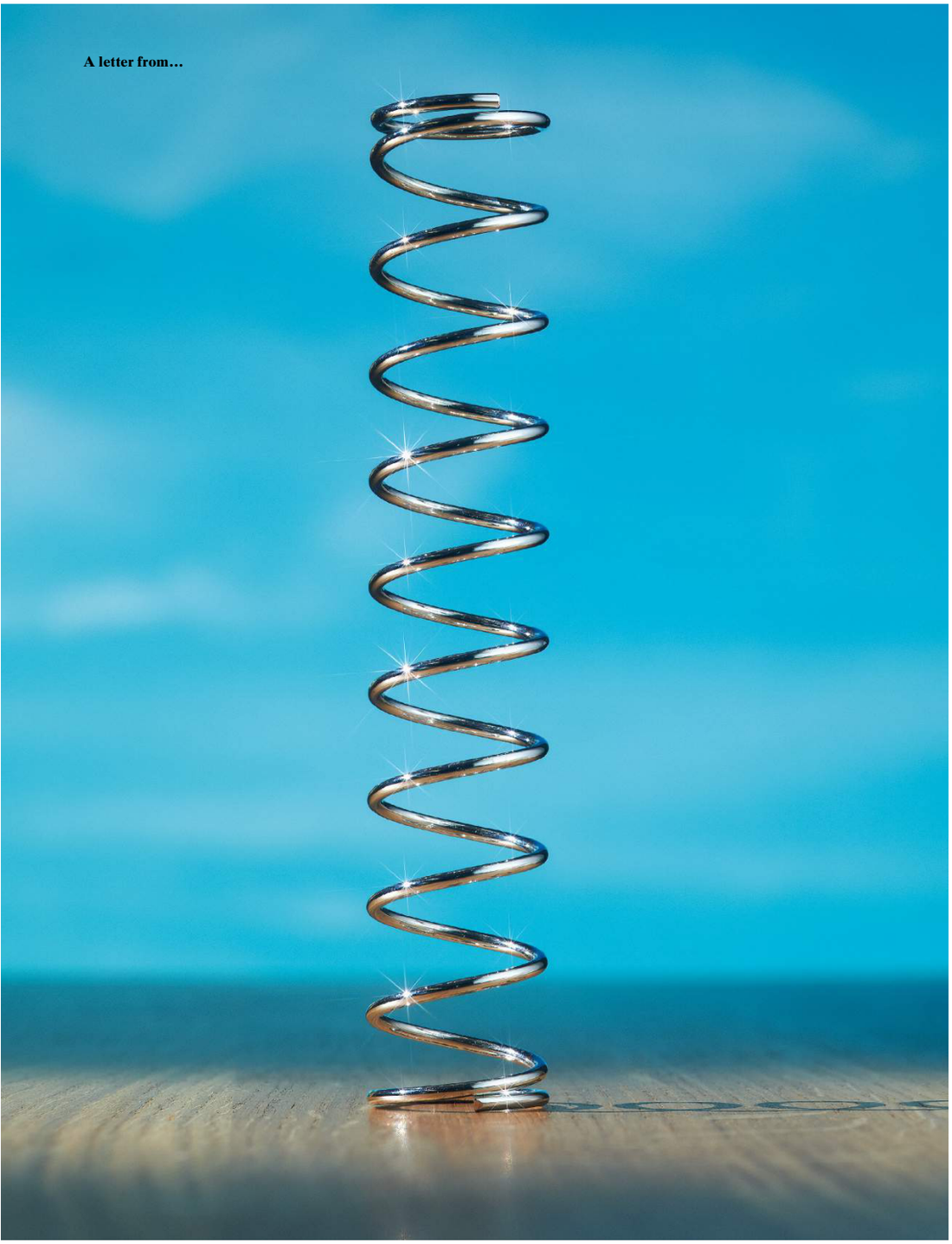
Fashion publishing is one of our most significant cultural artifacts. Often costly to produce, it involves the best creative minds, from photographers to writers, graphic designers to illustrators, and is often expensively and imaginatively produced. Whether rare or not-so-rare books and magazines, lookbooks and fashion-store catalogues, invitations to fashion shows, stationery, and ephemera – all of it has unique historical value, each piece an expression of our values and fascinations at moments in time and often holding social, political, and economic significance. It is also important because fashion has long driven the wider visual culture, its pioneering image-making creating desirable and artistic universes.

Despite this, much of fashion publishing – in all its forms – is simply thrown away and forgotten without a thought. Produced to promote or sell something, it rarely receives the critical or intellectual study it deserves and is often dismissed or ignored by collectors. Journalists discard this material after they've attended the shows or written their reviews. Consumers throw away commercial publications, perhaps because they are often free. This makes all this printed matter difficult to find once the season is over. Imagine how much is to be found in the trash – what a waste! Yet it's precisely this seeming ephemera that makes up the industry's historical footprint and could be such powerful tools to understanding fashion's trajectory through time.

Which is why, in 2020, I founded the International Library of Fashion Research in Oslo, Norway. It is the answer to questions I had long been asking myself. What does a 21st-century library look like? What could its mission be? While every other cultural field has accessible libraries, fashion's archives are too often in private collections or behind closed doors at schools, so how could a fashion library play a role in the future of the industry? Finding answers to these questions seemed particularly important when I saw new generations being brought up with visual content rather than text and appearing to mistrust traditional media. During the pandemic I also felt like there was a collective need for the project when material and immaterial fashion production came to a complete standstill, and the speed, cycles and seasons – the very structures upon which this industry is built – were totally interrupted.

All this illustrated even more clearly to me the real need at this particular moment for a library in which the printed word and image could be kept alive – free and completely accessible to future generations. Rather than being a mausoleum or a dumping ground for the past, the International Library of Fashion Research aims to use fashion's memory and the legacy of those who came before us to imagine multiple futures. Thanks to a seed collection donated by late fashion archivist Steven Mark Klein, and generous donations from fashion houses including Hermès and Comme des Garçons, the library's 10,000-piece collection is already an active site for study, thought and creation, open and accessible for those who seek it.

In our dedicated building on the campus of the new National Museum in Oslo sit bookshelves, some already filled, others waiting to hold the evidence of fashion's future past. I want the library to become a space for people to come to write and study, one that helps them to be published. There is an undeniable generosity in directing and dedicating our attention to one thing. I want to provide the healthy critical and collective environment that is necessary to helping fashion's printed matter interact with the larger cultural sphere. Unlike most of the material we hold, the library itself has no sell-by date. Our collection and vision will continue to grow, organically and steadily – and we'll take our time. The library is a never-ending process, a never-to-be-completed infinite. We are lucky enough to be independent, which allows us the privilege to resist, or at least separate ourselves from, the push and pulls of the fashion calendar. So while we don't yet have the ability to stop time or recreate the past, the contents of our collection mean that we can perhaps allow present and future readers, researchers and fashion lovers to *reread* it. As fashion continues its journey – sometimes looking forwards, sometimes back – our collection of printed ephemera from the past feels paradoxically ever-more alive and up to date. Long live the unfinished library!



Raised at *Dazed*

How a 'cultural resistance movement' launched a thousand careers. By Jefferson Hack. Photograph by Guillaume Blondiau.

Thanks so much to *System* for inviting me to write a letter in response to the British Fashion Council giving me a Special Recognition Award for Cultural Curation. Wonderful as it is to be acknowledged, and grateful as I am for the accolade, I've always known that my improbable mission was impossible for me to achieve on my own. I am grateful to the giants on whose shoulders of advice and support I now stand. Beautiful souls like Alexander McQueen, who taught me how to see beauty in unexpected places, and Nick Knight, who together made *Dazed & Confused* famous with their joint 'Fashion-Able' cover; Tibor Kalman, for showing me how the political and social can fuse with fashion and culture; Ingrid Sischy, for promising me that if I wanted it enough no interview would be out of reach; Jimmy Moffat, for opening up a world of design and photography that had previously felt unreachable; Ed Filipowski and Elizabeth Saltzman, for schooling me on how to navigate fashion weeks; and Franca Sozzani, for showing me that kindness and generosity can be virtues in this industry.

I am equally appreciative of the incredible talent I've met, people whose energy, commitment, love and generosity have enabled the platforms of *Dazed*, *AnOther* and Nowness to flourish over the years. I am constantly reminded (often by alumni) what a unique and particular experience it is for people to enter our world. 'There's nowhere like it', they say, 'it formed my point of view', 'it was the most fun I've had' – these are the kinds of comments I hear almost weekly. The rough and rowdy days in Old Street that began back in 1991 weren't without their issues (no smoking weed until after 6pm was one of the few rules), but at our new home, 180 Strand, they are a beautiful echo of the spirit we try and hold onto: the feeling of being a futuristic art college with what we imagine *Interview* magazine was like during its Warhol-era heyday. I could pretend it was always part of the vision, but in reality, when Rankin and I started over 30 years ago we didn't think it would last more than a couple of years. It just didn't seem feasible in any way that a black-and-white fold-out poster magazine called *Dazed & Confused* – which declared on its cover, 'this is not a magazine' – would snowball into a new type of cultural institution. We were complete outsiders, unknown and untrained. We were insolently anti everything established and positively pro anything new and radical. We were open to all comers as long as they were prepared to contribute to the party. That energy had to go somewhere, and it went into the pages, events and productions around the social experiment that was *Dazed & Confused*. It went into defying the odds stacked against a bunch of London club kids with a defiant attitude. I later managed to ascribe some language to what I now call our 'cultural resistance movement'. It was a movement that resisted categorization, one that, thanks to its expanded view of society, allowed everyone to be part of the revolution for which it was advocating. It was through that community – all those people it touched deeply – that it was prevented from failing. We were held aloft by the movement's quantum energy. Eventually we grew up (only slightly) and with the rollercoaster experience of *Dazed* and at a moment when the fashion industry was experiencing unprecedented growth, I was able to launch *AnOther Magazine* in 2001, *Another Man* in 2005 and Nowness in 2010. What the origin story of *Dazed* taught me is that experience doesn't matter, passion does. That money is not the most important ingredient, raw talent is. That what are considered wild and crazy ideas will soon be the new normal. There are still so many new barriers for every successive generation to break through and nothing makes me prouder than the work of current teams at Dazed Media who magically unify the digital, social, print and experiential platforms under the creative North Star of editor in chief Ibrahim Kamara. This new era of *Dazed* is redefining global youth culture through those teams' collective energy as they reinvent the role, purpose and presentation of what the platform can be for a new generation hungry and ready for new inspiration and representation. It is no surprise that *Dazed* was the first media outlet to pick up on the work of Ibrahim and our art director Gareth Wrighton when they were still at college, and that Ibrahim's first job in fashion was working with us. Now he is opening the doors for others in the same way that the door was opened for him, and true to the original ethos of the magazine we founded all those years ago, these newcomers continue to defy categorization and imagine the future, so that it can become their new enriched reality.

Online (fashion) criticism

How producing videos in his bedroom made the Fashion Roadman. By Odunayo Ojo. Photograph by Guillaume Blondiau.

I have always been fascinated by unconventional ways of doing things. As a young teen, I loved fashion and would scour Tumblr images and online clips. My obsessions led me down an unending YouTube fashion wormhole. For years, I noticed that most of the videos I saw were either styling videos or red-carpet outfit critiques – vastly different from the world of fashion I had come to love. I was reading about the history of old couturiers and sifting through runway reviews written by highly respected fashion critics. I just couldn't understand why the fashion journalists I looked up to, with all their knowledge, weren't bringing their expertise to YouTube and bridging the gap to people who had interesting fashion videos but were lacking in the wider context and knowledge of fashion history. At some point in 2017, I decided I wanted to be a fashion journalist. I had no idea how that was going to happen, but I was inspired by the 'educational' video content that Tim Blanks was making with Style.com. I had limited writing experience, but I had worked as a videographer, so making online content seemed the more sensible option. This all led to the creation of my fashion YouTube channel initially named The Fashion Archive, but now named Fashion Roadman. When I started it, I was very careful to ensure I was not the focal point and deliberately wore plain black T-shirts in most of the videos. I wanted people to concentrate on what I was saying, not how I looked or what I was wearing.

The channel was intended as a way to help educate the YouTube fashion community. My earliest videos were actually responses to questions I had seen in the comment sections of my favourite fashion YouTubers. This was a vast group including fashion-obsessed individuals who didn't read fashion articles and books, but preferred to consume their information as videos, and others who were clearly well educated about fashion, but wanted entertaining extra fashion content. These people were amazing, recommending books and resources that helped build my understanding of fashion, giving their unfiltered and sometimes harsh thoughts on the videos, and correcting anything I got wrong. It was a type of back-and-forth relationship that is difficult in any other medium and accelerated my understanding of fashion at a crazy rate.

I had no idea my YouTube channel would kickstart my career, and I viewed my dream of becoming a fashion journalist as a separate goal. I even went to Central Saint Martins to study fashion journalism because I felt I wouldn't be respected in the industry without a formal education. With hindsight, I realize that fashion journalism is less about writing for a major publication and more about effective communication regardless of the medium. Thanks to YouTube I became part of a new generation of online fashion critics.

Nevertheless, I like being able to communicate in multiple ways and in 2020 decided to launch a fashion magazine called *The Fashion Archive Magazine*. As with my YouTube channel, the magazine fills what I see as a gap in the market. Today, it can feel that many magazines are simply going through the motions and not writing anything critical to appease advertisers. The magazine is inspired by the 1980s and 1990s, when journalists would find really interesting stories and uncover previously unknown subcultures. This is why the cover of every issue is a single colour – I wanted it to be the opposite of glamour, focusing on the content, not the smoke and mirrors of a cover star. It also mirrors my YouTube channel's style, which is down to earth as most of the videos are filmed in my bedroom or living room. This gives a homey vibe, which contrasts with the over-polished studio set-ups people are used to.

Since I began in the industry it has become less obvious what exactly a fashion journalist is. For example, the new generation of interesting critics on TikTok – communicating effectively and backed up with strong research and deep knowledge – seem to me to be fashion journalists, even if some sections of the industry do not agree. It's another example of how the rules that held firm for years have been broken, opening up more and more alternate routes into the industry. Which include, as I've discovered, making videos in your bedroom.

‘There are way more rules to push against in menswear.’

For designer Martine Rose – and her best friend and stylist Tamara Rothstein – inspiration comes from lived experiences, not moodboards.

Interview by Murray Healy
Photographs by Oliver Hadlee Pearch
Styling by Tamara Rothstein

Previous page: Darrell wears denim vest, black jersey trousers, brown leather chaps, and wide leather belt, all Autumn/Winter 2016, and black leather brogues, Spring/Summer 2020. This page: Will wears pink roll-neck top, studded denim jacket, orange jeans, faux-fur leopard belt, and square-toed chain mules, all Autumn/Winter 2019.

Clifford wears shirt, straight-leg jeans, ring-pull loafers, leather belt, and keyring jewellery by Roxy Lee, all Spring/Summer 2023.

Shee Fun wears leather jacket, tassel shirt, and crinkle-denim jeans, all Spring/Summer 2018; 'sex' belt, Spring/Summer 2020; and brown woven loafers, Autumn/Winter 2020.

Will wears jacket, Spring/Summer 2019.

Shiva wears gathered-neck polo shirt,
telephone-print trousers, and
white square-toed chain mules,
all Spring/Summer 2022.

Darrell wears ring-pull shirt,
black jersey trousers,
blue leather chaps, wide leather belt,
and black leather leg pouch,
all Autumn/Winter 2016,
and black leather brogues,
Spring/Summer 2020.

Shiva wears lace-frill reversible bomber, leather shirt with lace-edge collar, and black joggers, Spring/Summer 2014, and black loafers, Autumn/Winter 2020.

Thibault wears clear PVC trench and clear PVC trousers, both Spring/Summer 2019, and black buckle loafers, Spring/Summer 2020.

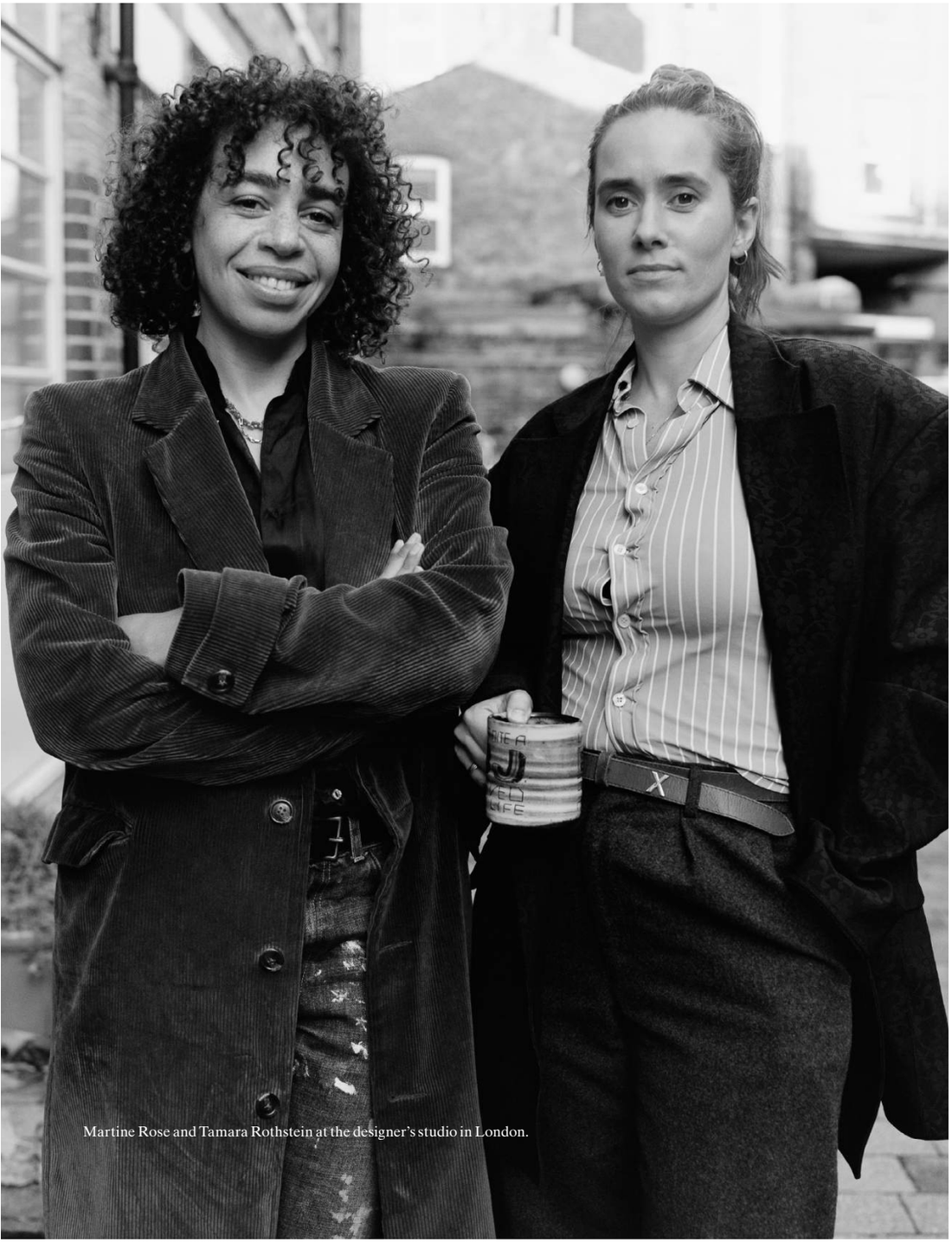
Nigel wears faux-fur coat, striped shirt, patch camouflage trousers, and beer-mat belt, all Fall/Winter 2018, and ring-pull loafers, Spring/Summer 2023.

Darrell wears hat, Spring/Summer 2011; playing-cards shirt and beer-mat trousers, Autumn/Winter 2013; and red snakeskin square-toed mules, Spring/Summer 2021.

Shiva wears gathered-neck polo shirt and telephone-print trousers, both Spring/Summer 2022.

Models: Thibault Aedy, Darrell Barrett, Shee Fun Chan, Annabelle Moedlinger, Oliver Newman, Oliver Hadlee Pearch, Will Peers, Clifford Rose, Shivaruby. Hair: Cyndia Harvey. Make-up: Marina Belfon Rose using Chanel Le Lift Pro and Eclat Lunaire Oversize Illuminating Face Powder. Nails: Edyta Betka. Production: Partner Films. Casting: Isabel Bush. Photography team: Bella Sporte, Abi Gualtieri, David Mannion, Max Hayter. Styling assistants: Georgia Illingworth, Alex White. Hair assistant: Emilie Bromley. Make-up assistant: Tia Louise Clement. Movement direction: Darrell Barrett. Darkroom services: Hammer Lab. Retoucher: Aly Studio

Oliver wears reversible jacket, mesh blazer, silk shirt, and crinkle-denim jeans, all Autumn/Winter 2022, and white square-toed chain mules, Spring/Summer 2022.



Martine Rose and Tamara Rothstein at the designer's studio in London.

Fundamental to Martine Rose's approach to her work is a seemingly simple question: why do people wear what they wear? It is an obsession she traces back to her childhood, when she would observe – and occasionally photograph – her big sister, Michelle, and their cousins getting ready to go out, scrutinizing and processing the real-life codes and customs that underlie notions of style. Long before she studied fashion, Martine's 'education' had come on London dancefloors in the 1990s, where clothing was often used to disclose an affiliation to a particular musical genre – a sophisticated visual language built on the heritage of working-class subcultures that had emerged on the streets of the city over the previous half-century.

It was on a foundation course at Camberwell School of Art that Martine Rose first met fellow student and London-born clothing obsessive Tamara Rothstein, but it was only in the early 2000s that the pair bonded while interning as stylists on men's magazines in Soho: Martine on the monthly *Arena* and Tamara on its biannual sister title, *Arena Homme+* (where, it should be noted, I worked at the same time). Soon afterwards the duo launched a T-shirt label, LMNOP, but after struggling to keep up with orders, they closed it after four busy seasons. Tamara moved on to forge her career as a stylist, while Martine founded her namesake label in 2007, marking the start of an exploration into menswear and masculine style codes.

Over the 15 years since the label's launch, progressive currents in men's fashion have tended to push towards abstraction – from flights of fantasy veering towards fancy dress at one extreme to a fetishization of functionalism that risks vapidity at the other. Martine's response to this has been to ground menswear in the particular and the real, before leading it somewhere new. Reunited and closely aided by Tamara, who has styled the collections since 2016, Martine has taken an approach rooted in her own lived experience and the clothing choices of people she sees in everyday life, rather than arbitrary fashion references. She dedicated her Autumn/Winter 2017 collection, for example, to 'bankers, office workers and bus drivers'. The City boys who wear their shirts a size too small to show off their gym work; wide boys in square-toed loafers; and even the relaxed style of dad-dancing middle-aged men: all have played a role in inspiring clothes that are wearably familiar, yet executed in unexpected and off-kilter ways. From football shirts cut in extreme proportions, to running shorts trimmed in French-maid lace, to tailored suits made from delicate fabrics meant for women's lingerie, Martine Rose's work balances the uniformity of men's dress codes with the eccentric individualism for which London club culture was once famous, synthesizing conformity with idiosyncrasy, the ordinary with the oddball.

The designer's insistence on focusing on the world she knows extends to how and where she presents her collections, often choosing show locations with a biographical connection: the Kentish Town primary school her daughter attends; the Chalk Farm cul-de-sac that's home to Tamara's sister; and for the Spring/Summer 2023 show, a railway arch in Vauxhall. This south London space had a significance both personal – it was in a club here that the designer celebrated her 14th birthday – and cultural – after the show she spoke about the area's historical importance to the city's gay scene. Some of these touchpoints are so personal or niche that Martine and Tamara are often surprised at how powerfully they resonate with a broader, global audience.

This grounding in a recognizable reality gives the label the kind of authenticity that luxury brands have historically struggled to create. It's the magic ingredient that Demna wanted when he called on Martine to help him design the first three Balenciaga menswear collections. More recently, it is what drew Louis Vuitton's CEO Michael Burke to her Spring/Summer 2023 show as (at the time of writing) the luxury behemoth looks to find a successor for Virgil Abloh as head of menswear. In October, I met up with Martine and Tamara at the label's Crouch Hill studio to talk about their subcultural influences, the peculiarities of their approach to menswear, and the growing family of design-team members and model muses they have gathered around themselves. But before we started the interview, Martine was keen to show me through some old photographs – the ones that accompany these pages – that had been gathering dust in her sister's attic.

'Tam and I have worked together for so long, and our relationship, that dynamic, comes from our shared experience of growing up in London.'

Murray Healy: So these are photos of your sister Michelle, and her friends.

Martine Rose: Part of this story for *System* is about my influences and my

inspirations, and one of my main inspirations was my sister. There's this big age gap between us – when she was 22, I was 7. That's my daughter's age now, and I see how she watches absolutely everything, and I remember watching my sister in the same way. I've got loads of older cousins, a really big extended family. We'd all go to my nan's house, and I used to watch them like a hawk getting ready to go out. My sister really pushed the envelope with fashion. It wasn't even fashion; it was clothes. Fashion did not come onto my radar. 'Fashion' – in inverted commas – was white, rich, abstract – something very removed for me.

Tamara Rothstein: Catwalk.

Martine: Yeah, catwalk. There were a few exceptions to that, crossovers into the street culture that translated into what my cousins and my sister would wear. My sister had loads of Gaultier and was also really into Pam Hogg. The boys would be in Versace jeans, and Moschino was a crossover as well. But by the time it had crossed over, it became clothes, connected to a subculture, usually in music. My sister was really risky and made her own clothes.

Tamara: She was going out a lot as well.

Martine: She went out a lot, and she was into different music scenes. She was into Twelve Tribes,[1] which was like a real dub roots reggae scene, so she was hanging out with lots of the reggae artists coming to the UK and would take me to their recording studios. There was a very UK Lovers Rock[2] scene; she was very into that. I just watched her. I was pretty obsessed with my sister, just watching her be sort of fab in London in the 1980s and 1990s. My cousin Darren, who was a bit younger than my sister, was really into rave culture, going to Camden Palace, Raindance,[3] Telepathy.[4] So I had this broad sense of clothing being associated with different nights and different scenes. I had a really precocious experience of dance culture and music culture and how they affected the clothes. Like I said, it wasn't fashion. My family's Jamaican, and there was a very, very particular respect for style. Fashion was something… almost basic; if you had style, that was something else. There was an undercurrent of that. My grandad was a tailor, my nan was a dressmaker. So fashion felt…

Tamara: It's true, isn't it? There was a difference between style and fashion then.

Martine: You didn't necessarily have the money to do fashion. So it was little nuances of detail, like a handkerchief or the way you tilt your hat – tiny little things.

Having a family where people made clothes must have demystified clothing, too.

Martine: Absolutely. The family had a dressmaker in Wimbledon called Phyllis. Ah, bless Phyllis. Often my sister or my cousins would go to Phyllis with a tear-out from *Vogue* or something like that – 'I want something like this', take their own fabrics, and Phyllis would just make it. She did it all freehand, on the body. She was amazing. Of course, you weren't going to go to Versace and buy it, but you could go to Phyllis in Wimbledon, and she could knock it up and make it look fabulous. That gold top that my sister's wearing in that picture [opposite page], Phyllis made that.

***Vogue* would have been a reference then?**

Martine: Next to her bed, my sister used to have all these *Vogues* stacked as shelves. She must have had 300, 400. *Vogue* was a reference, but maybe as something to translate. Less as something aspirational, less looking up.

It's interesting the role that the landline phone plays in these photos.

Martine: I must have been eight or nine when I took those pictures of my sister modelling on the phone. It's that very classic posing. It's like Malick Sidibé,[5] the Malian photographer – that very classic studio shot of people on telephones. For my dad's generation who first moved here from the West Indies, a telephone was a sign that you'd made it, of luxury or success. There's so many pictures of my sister posing with the phone. With one of those cords. It's really interesting.

That's also a recurring motif in Syd Brak's paintings for Athena posters in the 1980s,[6] which inspired a print in your Spring/Summer 2022 collection.

Martine: Yes! I've got it in the studio, actually. It's so true. I didn't think about it in that way – it's very Athena. And there's loads of pictures of my sister looking in the mirror doing her makeup, with someone over her shoulder so you can't see the photographer. It's this way of getting an image of yourself. I guess it's an early form of selfie.

'There weren't many people in popular culture who felt relevant to me. I guess you had Neneh Cherry, Sade. Beyond that, it was people closer to home.'

1987. 'This is my sister Michelle, sneaking out of the window of cousin Deonne's bedroom at my nan's house in Tooting, south London. Almost certainly off to go clubbing in Balham. Michelle distinctly remembers those Russell & Bromley sandals with the ankle strap.'

1985. 'At mum and dad's house in Croydon, Michelle in her underwear, on the landline, on the landing. I took this photo. I was only six at the time.'

1990. 'Michelle posing in her bedroom. Both the gold top and red leather skirt were made by Phyliss, the local tailor in Wimbledon, based on pages from *Vogue* that Michelle gave her.' Michelle: 'But I did all the embellishment by hand – it took me *ages*.'

1989. 'Michelle in her bedroom at mum and dad's house.'

Circa 1988. 'Mum and dad moved to the outskirts of Bristol around the time I was born, for dad's work. My older brother and sister *hated* it there, having gotten so used to growing up in London. So any chance they had, they'd go back up to stay at nan's house.'

1985. 'Getting ready for night out.'

1987. 'Michelle wearing 'leather and lace' for a friend's fashion show.'

1989. 'Getting ready to go out clubbing. All the girls in the family would congregate in Deonne's bedroom at nan's house.'

1987. 'This was at a venue called the Bouncing Ball in Peckham. [Top] Michelle wearing a straw hat and headscarf; [middle], Norman Beaton, whose father of the same name was the actor who played the lead character in the TV programme *Desmond's*; [bottom] cousin Lorna. They were all modelling in a fashion show for Danny King, who had a legendary hat shop called the Big Apple on Acre Lane in Brixton. He made and sold hats to all the big reggae artists of the time, as well as pop stars such as Sade.'

So did your sister ask you to take these photos?
Martine: Yeah, and I'm terrible at taking photos! Even if the photos I took of her are actually really good.
Tamara: I feel like she would have been directing you because you were so young.
Martine: I was so young. Pictures of her in her underwear, on the phone – very stylized.
Tamara: Like creating a character.

So it wasn't about 'I'm about to go out and I want a photo of my look'?
Martine: No! It wasn't just 'I'm going out tonight, don't I look fab?'; it was much more 'it's Sunday afternoon, I'm on the phone, let's do a little photo shoot'.

That must have had an effect on you in terms of how you put a look together and what it means.
Martine: Hugely. I really remember sitting on my sister's bed and just dissecting it all. We're really different people – I'm tomboyish, and she was very feminine, very girlie. Her clothes were really sexy. So she did influence me, but not in terms of her personal style at all. There was a playfulness, I think, with clothes, and a pleasure in clothes, in making clothes. That was more the influence.
Tamara: And the excitement of going out.
Martine: Totally. I just wanted access to this other world that everyone around me could access. And clothing was a part of it. It was a way in. I was about 13 when I started playing with clothes myself. That's when I started going out to clubs in London. And then I played with clothes for a different reason: I needed to look older. So, around 13. [Rolls her eyes, quietly says] Fucking hell.

I was reading about you going to Strawberry Sundae[7] when you were 14.
Martine: I had my 14th birthday in Strawberry Sundae, yeah.
Tamara: I had my 15th in Emporium,[8] which is now Sadie Coles' gallery, in Kingly Street.

Do you think kids are clubbing at that age now?
Martine: You can't go out at 13!
Tamara: You can't go out like we could. We talk about this quite a lot – there aren't that many clubs in central London any more. Nightlife in central London is done and dusted, isn't it? You used to be able to go down Regent Street and there were a couple of clubs, and then to Hanover Square, dodge into Kingly Street. Then over to the Hippodrome, Leicester Square.

There was an all-night culture around Soho – not just clubs, but bars and cafés too.
Martine: I remember going to cafés on Greek Street after going to clubs. I just couldn't wait to get into that nocturnal world, and clothes were a part of it.

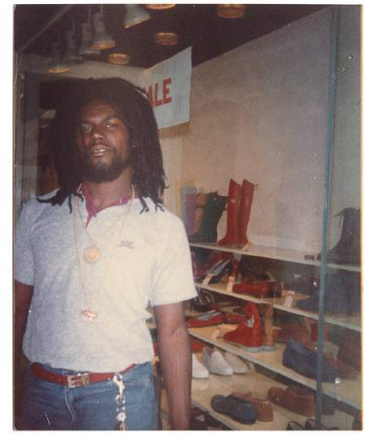
That culture wasn't heavily documented at the time. You might see fragments of it in magazines.
Martine: Yeah, fragments. It was tantalizing. I'd see them before they went out, I'd see them the next morning. You'd catch it in the ether, but it was like smoke – there was no proof of it. 'Where is this thing? Where are you all going?' It was like parallel universes running side by side, and clothes represented some sort of key.

At that age were there any figures in popular culture you were looking to for inspiration?
Martine: You know, I never really had that. I was really preoccupied with the people who were in my family, I guess. There weren't that many people in popular culture who felt relevant to me. I guess you had Neneh Cherry, Sade. You look for people who look like you, who you can recognize. Beyond that, it was very much people who were in my immediate reach. I wasn't looking at models or anything like that.

Were you looking at magazines?
Martine: I started looking at *The Face* and *i-D* when I was 14. I was also looking at music magazines. I was really into *Mixmag* because I wanted to read about the nights out. So it was this cross-pollination thing. It was *all* of it. It was pop culture.
Tamara: I remember reading *Time Out*.

***Time Out* was good for club listings.**
Martine: It was really good. I found an old club listing the other day. I was trying to find the address for Strawberry Sundae, because I did my last show in the railway arch [in Vauxhall], and I was trying to work out if it was the same arch that they did Strawberry Sundae in. This old listing came up, and it was amazing: every single night of the week there were so many nights you could go to. Like on Thursday, Gilles Peterson at Bar Rumba,[9] Saturday nights at

'My family's Jamaican, and there was a particular respect for style. Fashion was something almost basic; but if you had *style*, that was something else.'



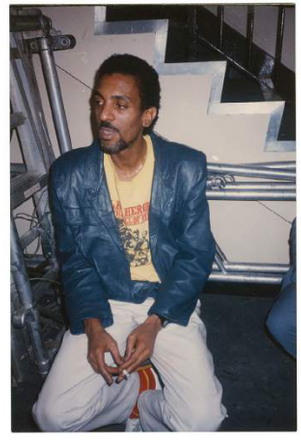
1988. 'Robert "Wongy" Wong, a Chinese-Jamaican on "Frontline Road", which was based around Railton Road in Brixton. The Front Line was basically where you'd find all the action at the time.'

1989. 'Michelle with cousin George at nan's house. Michelle is wearing a Pam Hogg dress and cowboy boots. That dress was beautiful and really sexy; it had puffed Tudor sleeves. Even though she clearly wasn't a punk, Michelle was drawn to Pam Hogg's anti-establishment associations.'

1989. 'Michelle on the sofa in nan's living room with family friends, Devon – shades indoors! – and Stephen.'

1987. 'Tony Henderson, a reggae musician from West London.'

1990. 'Michelle backstage at a performance of a travelling theatre show called *Black Heroes*, a pioneering show that toured around the UK and Jamaica. It told the story of, as the name suggests, black heroes such as Bob Marley and Malcolm X. Michelle was part of the cast and also did all the make-up.'



1990. 'Flip Fraser, the founder and director of the *Black Heroes* theatre show – a real pioneer.'

1990. 'Michelle on holiday in Jamaica, in the courtyard of her friend's parents' house.'

1990. 'Michelle on the beach in Kingston, Jamaica.'

Subterania or Hanover Grand. And I had that feeling of 'Oh my God, look at what we've lost'.

Tamara: I remember being on the train to sixth-form college looking at all the listings in *Time Out*, working out where I was going to go. Then I remember coming across sample sales. Remember those? That was also my little way into fashion. I was going to sample sales from quite a young age, just to get something for a good price and get a look at that world. I remember travelling all over for sample sales.

You were fitting in nights out between school?

Tamara: Yeah, and doing a lot of lying!

Martine: It fills me with absolute horror. Tam and I have worked together for so long, and our relationship, that dynamic, a certain amount of it comes from our shared experience of growing up in London. There's this understanding of club culture and stuff like that, but I also think it's as much about our differences as our commonalities, because we're very different people. So there's this tension between us, I think. I have this realness, so my references are always about accessibility.

Tamara: Your clothing always has to be believable – would you wear that?

Martine: It has to be real. Like, it's not total fantasy. I have to be able recognize it so I can push it somewhere else. What you bring, Tam, and why we've worked together for so long, is this arty, this art thing to it.

Tamara: Yeah, this difficulty.

Martine: Another touchpoint for me and Tam is we're both prepared to really go weird. We'll never rein each other in on the weirdness.

Tamara: No, and when it works and it's weird, that's when we know it's right. There's no real reason for it being right, apart from we both know it is.

Martine: We're both very instinctive – another touchpoint.

Tamara: Again in very different ways. My growing up was very different. My dad had a lot of different girlfriends, very good-looking women who I was always looking at and quite impressed by, watching them wearing clothes and putting it together. And my mum, too. So, it wasn't my sister; it was really my parents. Although Martine and I are very, very different, we both have this shared experience of looking at older people dressing up. It's something we still do.

Martine: Observing.

Tamara: I know that we can be in a room, and I'll see something out of the corner of my eye, and 10 minutes later, I'll be like, 'Did you see that?' and Martine will be like, 'I *really* saw it.' I don't even have to say it there and then because I know you will have seen it.

Why do you think you both tune into the same details?

Tamara: It's just this real interest in people, and in clothing, and in what clothing says about someone's personality – where they've come from, where they're going. Also, I think neither of us have *ever* been stagnant in our approaches.

Martine: It's very easy to find a formula that works and trot that out for a little bit. That totally makes sense and that's what most people do. You find that magic thing and you keep doing it. Tam and I have never really done that, and if I fall into particular patterns of design, which is normal, or if Tam does…

Tamara: …with the styling, or putting something together…

Martine: …we can tell each other. I love watching Tam's process; I find it really exciting. I like giving Tam a whole load of clothes or I like Tam coming in and seeing what she's drawn to.

At what stage do you come in, Tamara?

Martine: We're not very rigid with that either.

Tamara: No.

Martine: We're trying to get a little bit more organized with it, just because the collection's getting bigger, but you've started to come in at fittings early enough to be like, 'I'm not going to style with that, I'm not going to use that.' Early enough to make changes, but not so early that it's still hard for anyone other than the design team to understand. We don't have a very rigid process. It's a lot of conversation. There's a lot of playfulness in our process. And it can feel, I guess…

Tamara: Not very organized.

Martine: Very *un*-organized.

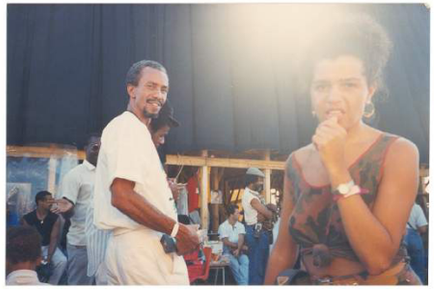
Is there a tension between the looseness of your instinctive approach and your team getting bigger?

Tamara: Sometimes people want organization. We have to be almost like, well, sometimes it's the organization that can kill something.

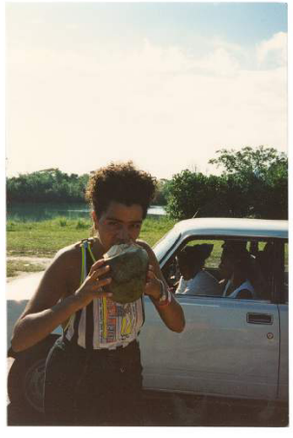
Martine: We have to safeguard it, absolutely. I've always said, it doesn't matter how big my brand gets, I always want to feel like a small brand. There's a certain looseness and a lightness that small

'Although Martine and I are very, very different, we both have this shared experience of looking at older people dressing up. It's something we still do.'

1990. 'Throughout the mid-1980s and early 1990s, Michelle went to Jamaica pretty often; a couple of those times was when they toured the *Black Heroes* theatre show there. In this photo, she's in a recording studio in Kingston with a local musician.'



1988. 'Michelle in Jamaica, backstage at Reggae Sunsplash, a huge reggae festival back then.'



1988. 'Michelle in Jamaica.'

1988. 'Freddie McGregor, a singer and record producer, backstage at Reggae Sunsplash.'

1988. 'Tina, Michelle and Ingrid backstage at Reggae Sunsplash.'

1988. 'Michelle at Reggae Sunsplash.'

1988. 'Dennis Brown and John Holt backstage at Reggae Sunsplash, with Eek-A-Mouse in the background.'

1988. 'Tina and Michelle backstage at Reggae Sunsplash, with John Holt and Dennis Brown in the background.'

1988. 'Dennis Brown on the left and Michelle's friend Adrienne on the right, backstage at Reggae Sunsplash.'

1982. 'France, Lorna and Michelle in Deonne's bedroom, aged 18.'

1985. [Left] 'My older brother Richard in nan's house, [right] and with his friend, Soljie, outside the house.'

brands have. It's much harder to keep that sensitivity when you are boshing out thousands of one product or whatever, or you've got 50 people in your company. It's a delicate balance.
Tamara: Also, what's interesting about the process is I can tell what Martine likes and where we're going, but sometimes she will throw in a curveball and I'll be like, 'Fuck – I've known you for so long and so intimately, and I still did not see that coming.'

What you said earlier about not sticking to a formula, what is that keeps you finding new ways of working? Is there something you're still looking for?
Martine: That's a really good question! Possibly. Or it's like a restlessness, but it's also trust. I really trust Tam. I feel there's a comfort, a safety net in continuing to explore different methods. You can be who you really want to be in this safe space because you can trust that it's going to work.
Tamara: It doesn't matter if you slip up along the way.
Martine: It really doesn't.
Tamara: I can sometimes put together something disgusting – couldn't give a shit! You know what I mean? Because we both know…
Martine: …know there's a safety net.

You need the freedom to do work without holding yourself back.
Tamara: Or being worried about what that person's going to think of you.
Martine: Exactly.

So there isn't any self-consciousness?
Martine: No, there isn't. Definitely not with Tam. I can be self-conscious in lots of other contexts, even with the design team. You know, it's exposing, being a designer. I know my team feels exposed when they show me some of their ideas, because it *is* exposing.

You're explicitly inviting judgement, aren't you?
Martine: Totally. You're putting yourself out there.
Tamara: We're both really ambitious, but not an ambition that wants to own the world.
Martine: We just want to create really good work.
Tamara: I don't even look at it as fashion. I look at it as a proposition, of what something could be and where it's going forward and also where it's been. Because we can be nostalgic. [To Martine] I told Murray that we referenced him walking to the gym in Soho.
Martine: That's true. That was in the last collection. 'Go on, put your gym bag over your back and walk up and down. Let's pretend it's Compton Street in 2008.'

Again, it comes back to the culture of a very specific time and place and you both having experienced that.
Martine: Absolutely. It has to be rooted in something I recognize. It can go somewhere else, but I have to be able to connect it to something I can recognize. Sometimes I'm surprised when it resonates with so many people. Like, I had this amazing response from people who came up to me in New York. That is so surprising, because they're such specific references…

That you think there might only be 50 people in the whole world who'd get it.
Martine: Exactly, yet somehow it manages to transcend that. I also really enjoy how it becomes this other message to someone else or that people actually *do* understand the reference, when I thought it was much more niche. People do get it or a version of it.
Tamara: Also, we never pull from just one thing, do we? It's all these little bits coming together.
Martine: Layers and layers of references, and sometimes I don't even want people to get the reference.
Tamara: Sometimes we don't even know where it's come from.
Martine: It's just *there* [indicates the ether] – like smoke somewhere.
Tamara: There was a guy who we used to see around Camden, do you remember? We saw him one day in three different places. So sometimes it can be from a stranger. It is everyday people in everyday jobs.
Martine: Complete strangers you can project all sorts of stories onto.
Tamara: I project quite a lot of stories.

That's a very specific way of approaching style. Not fashion as dressing up, but about why people wear what they wear.
Martine: It's codes. Yeah, exactly – there's an elegance, a style. People have different definitions of what makes someone stylish, and I'm obsessed with these notions of style.

That distinction between fashion and style, which used to be so specific, does that still exist?
Martine: Unfortunately not, I don't

'Martine will sometimes throw in a curveball and I'll be like, 'Fuck – I've known you for so long and so intimately, and I still did not see that coming.''

think it does. *The Blitz*[10] was on TV the other night, did you watch it? It was fantastic, obviously, because it was fundamentally that. You couldn't go out wearing the same thing twice, and you had to make it. It wasn't about buying; there was nothing off the peg. It was about individuality in the most extreme way – style.

Tamara: There used to be style magazines and fashion magazines, but I wouldn't know what the difference is now. It's also a sin of designers, where brands want a full look. That can basically make every magazine look a bit like a shopping guide. What is a style magazine when you can't style?

Martine: You're just not creating a proposition.

You mentioned your team growing. Is there any pressure for your brand to keep growing from the outside?

Martine: There's definitely pressure to keep growing. There's a pressure on myself to keep growing as well, but…

Tamara: It's to do better.

Martine: It's wanting to do better.

I mean in terms of business, expanding – like doing eight collections a year.

Martine: There is, of course. There are definitely pressures to grow. But I also partnered with Tomorrow,[11] and they are really sensitive to me as a designer. I was already 14 years in when they joined me, so I already had a fully formed business. I was very much like, 'I need to feel like I have a sense of control over this thing.' If I'm not ready to do four collections a year, I'm not going to do it. That's fine. I'm in it for the long run. I really enjoy what I do; I like working with the people I work with; I like working with new people. I'm in no rush. I'm happy to grow, but it has to be thoughtful, it has to be done at the right time – it's not growth at any cost. A friend on the design team actually said to me the other day, 'I think you can only do what you do because you don't think about tomorrow.' And it's true – I really don't think about tomorrow. That's a curse as well as a blessing. I do not plan; I really trust in my 'now'. I'm willing to sacrifice the security of having a plan to just enjoy what I'm doing now and who I'm with and what I'm on. I'm not a worrier. Not at all, really.

Tamara: We're really lucky because Martine has – maybe through only being in the moment – carved out a pretty brilliant scenario for us all. We went to art college together, but we weren't friends then. We also had a mutual friend, Meera, who has always been Martine's print designer and works across everything now, and another friend, Chau [Har Lee], designs the shoes.

Martine: Who also went to art school with us.

Tamara: So the four of us met at this very important moment in like 1998 at Camberwell.

Martine: When we were 18. We didn't find our people until art school.

Tamara: Then we were like, 'These are my people. They understand us.'

Martine: Yeah – 'Thank fuck, these are my people.'

So you met at Camberwell College of Arts on the foundation course?

Martine: Exactly. Then we went off to do our degrees and lost contact. Not really lost contact…

Tamara: I'd still hear about you, because of Meera.

Martine: Then we interned at *Arena*. We found each other again through work and started working almost straight away when we set up LMNOP together.

Tamara: That was Meera's brainwave. She was like, 'I think you two should do something else. Why don't you two come together and do this?' She kind of match-made that situation.

Martine: I didn't know that. Did she?

Tamara: Yeah, she was like, 'You two should have a conversation about this.'

Martine: That's funny. That was such a funny little art project we were doing and then it just *worked*. That was bizarre.

Tamara: Do you remember us printing on the *Arena Homme+* copier, Murray?

Martine: We'd go back into the office and use the photocopier at two, three in the morning.

Tamara: We'd use everything. *Everything*. I think you had to.

I think quite a few outside enterprises began life in those offices.

Martine: A hundred per cent. Isn't it funny? So many people must have started their little businesses like that.

Tamara: But then you were also working for free, which is something that's not really allowed any more – for good or for bad.

Martine: We were working for free. I got in so much debt with an Egg credit card. My time at *Arena* was basically subsidized by that card.

Why did you set up LMNOP?

Martine: LMNOP was started when

'I was squatting, my daughter Valentine was born in 2015 – and I had to grow up really quickly. I was still working in a bar until I was 34.'

1984. 'Michelle in nan's living room.'

1988. 'Michelle getting ready in Deonne's bedroom at nan's house.'

Circa 1983. 'Michelle posing with a boombox in front of nan's house.'

1983. 'Michelle in nan's living room. She's wearing a West Ham football top with a belt to go out. It was the first time Michelle realized she had nice legs!'

1990. 'Michelle in Paris.'

1988. 'Michelle at her friend Karen's house, posing with Karen's baby, Sean. She was just back from holiday in Turkey and wearing her French Connection jumper.'

1983. 'Michelle and me, aged about 4, on a big family holiday in Greece.'

we were both interning; we started it in Tam's bedsit in Primrose Hill. It was this little project to alleviate the lack of creativity we both felt working at a magazine. Basically, I was so bored. I hated styling and knew that I didn't want to be a stylist. It's funny that we both ended up at men's magazines.

Tamara: It's also interesting that Martine Rose is a menswear brand, because there is something about womenswear… [Sighs] Womenswear for me in some ways is more confusing, because so much of womenswear has been abused – you *have* to do this and you *have* to do that, the way you wear clothes or don't wear clothes. It's not as straightforward as menswear.

Do you think there's more of an orthodoxy with womenswear?

Tamara: Everything used to take us quite a long time.

Martine: We did everything by hand – *everything*. We even screen-printed all the little labels by hand, the coat hangers. It was such a labour of love. We'd work all through the night on that bloody thing.

Was this a substantial order?

Martine: It was 200 T-shirts or something. By *hand*. We didn't know what we were doing; we had no sense of time or making money or anything. So we just worked all the time, and then worked in bars in between.

Tamara: It's a common story.

Was that a form of protection, that naivety where you go into it not knowing how difficult it can be?

fucking wouldn't do it. The only reason I'm here is because the naivety protected me at the beginning. For sure.

That ties into what you were saying about designing for the moment and not looking ahead.

Martine: That's true. Absolutely true. I don't have a grand plan.

Tamara: I also think you just *really* enjoy making clothes.

Martine: I do.

Tamara: You really enjoy it. It wouldn't even have mattered if you didn't get an order, you'd have just carried on. It was an art form.

Martine: It was. [Sighs] I don't know. It was fucking hard. If Balenciaga hadn't called, if Demna hadn't called at that time, I think I would have absolutely chucked it in.

'Keeping my brand going was fucking hard. If Demna hadn't called at that time, I think I would have absolutely chucked it in.'

Martine and Tamara : I think there's more of an orthodoxy with menswear.

Martine: That's why I like it.

Tamara: That's why it's more interesting to style with, because you're more restricted.

Martine: Anyway, we started LMNOP, this funny little thing. First of all, it was like T-shirts – we did 10 T-shirts, didn't we? Some friends were doing a showroom on Leonard Street, and they agreed to take our funny little hand-drawn T-shirts: 'We'll put it in the corner of our showroom and see what happens.' And it fucking sold! We were like, 'What?!' They said, 'Yeah, you've got an order from Japan' and we were like, 'Fuck. So now we've got to produce it? What does that even mean? What?!' So we had to scramble it all together really quickly.

Martine: Oh fucking hell, yes – otherwise I wouldn't have done it. When I finished LMNOP, by that stage, Tam knew for sure she wanted to be a stylist and I knew for sure I wanted to be a designer. So it was a real testing ground.

Tamara: LMNOP did grow a bit, but because what we were making took us so long we weren't earning anything from it.

Martine: We were losing money hand over fist, but we didn't do it for long enough to really get burned. We did it until we got bored. It didn't burn me enough not to start my own business…

Because you jumped straight back in with your own brand.

Martine: I jumped straight back in. But I honestly think, if I knew then what I know now, I wouldn't do it. No, I

Really?

Martine: I was squatting, my daughter Valentine was born [in 2015] – I had to grow up really quickly. I was still working in a bar until I was 34, I was doing bits of teaching. I loved working in clubs, I loved working in bars – *loved* it. I loved that interaction because I really love people. I find people so inspiring, and I met some mind-blowing people working in bars. I would happily have carried on working in bars, to be honest. I've also always been a bit ambivalent about the industry. Then when I had Valentine and I got kicked out, I was just like… I don't think I can do this any more.

Tamara: It's that responsibility, isn't it?

When you've got other people depending on you, it's a different story. It's interesting that you loved working in

clubs and bars, because your understanding of clothing comes through that specific living, breathing social context – it's not some rarefied discourse.
Martine: Exactly. It's part of the same thing. I worked in Blacks and Century in Soho, and Plastic People… All of that knowledge, all of those people who I met – I can't even tell you how they've informed my design work. These characters I recall, and these moments and nights, they somehow get mixed up in my head and vomited out for the collection somehow. [Laughs] They really do, and I still find myself referencing people and nights. I miss working in bars, actually. It was much more than just part-time work to me.

It was almost research?
Martine: Exactly.

out and research in the way we used to: going to clubs and bars, chewing the fat – we don't have the time to do that. So we both get that from casting. I'm still really interested in people; I'm interested in my team, in what they do. I'm nosy, basically! With street-casting, it's fun to watch someone come to life and be playful with clothes. There's one guy that we work with in particular, Will – he's wonderful, he's a chef. I don't think he can see it, but he has *something* in him that is magical.
Tamara: Magical.
Martine: You see him really grow in the clothes when we dress him up. We put him in weird shit and he goes with it. It brings something out in him.
Tamara: People feeling good about themselves is why we're in this, and clothes do that.

peplums, you have to do that too to get those sales. That's why I think women's is so hard.
Martine: It's just enormous. How do you find your voice in it? It's so crowded.
Tamara: It's a bit like when I used to walk into Topshop when I was younger, when I was in my early twenties, and I'd be like, 'Oh my God, who am I?'
Martine: Overwhelmed. What tribe?
Tamara: Am I a cowgirl? Am I a hippy? And I think that's what's happened to women's. It's so easily been destroyed, whereas men's has somewhat been protected.
Martine: Fundamentally, there are way more rules in menswear – and that's what I really, really enjoy: that there are still things to push against. There's not much to push against in women's. I find the limits in men's really exciting.

'There's a looseness that small brands have. It's harder to keep that sensitivity when you're boshing out thousands of one product. It's a delicate balance.'

What do you do now to get that access to watching people in that way?
Tamara: Casting.
Martine: Yes, that's true. We do quite a lot of street-casting, so we meet some *wonderful* people. You're so right, Tam.
Tamara: And we really *love* wonderful people. Which sounds really cheesy, but we would never put anyone in the show…
Martine: …who we didn't like.
Tamara: Even if they were brilliant.
Martine: Even if they were beautiful and made the clothes look good. There's a characteristic I think that Tam and I both find appealing – I can't define it, but there's some quality that's really important. There's definitely a connection that we feel to the casting, where we have to *feel* the relationship with that person. Obviously we can't go

Martine: I think we had that a lot on the last show, didn't we?
Tamara: Yes, more than normal.
Martine: I don't know if it was because it was our first show after Covid and people were really happy to get together, but you could just see the casting – they were so pumped. It wasn't a job to them; it was more than that. Like, being their full selves.

I want to take you back to something you said about the differences between menswear and womenswear. Do you think there's more creative freedom in menswear at the moment?
Martine: Totally. I feel like there's a saturation in womenswear. It's very hard to find your lane because it's so massive.
Tamara: You have to do everything as well. Like, if women start wearing

Is the resistance of men to wearing certain things something you feel you have to challenge?
Martine: I enjoy challenging it, but I don't feel like I *have* to challenge it. I enjoy it when it's not a ridiculous proposition; again, it's not a total fantasy. The example that comes into my head is when we put [model and musician] Miles in a women's camisole and he still looked so sexy. It's not something for something's sake. I want it to be believable. If someone could just think that it's a possibility for a second, you know what I mean? That it's a real possibility. [Showing a shot of Miles from Spring/Summer 2021 on her phone.] I mean, it's so sexy. I think he just looks so beautiful in that.
Tamara: But it's everything: it's the clothes, it's him, it's the body language.

Which reinforces how vital the casting is.
Martine: Really important. You do fall in love with these people, these characters we meet, over the season a little bit. They are very much part of the process.
Tamara: We really care about them and

then it happens that they care about us.
Martine: Then they're really invested in the collection: 'We really want to do well.' Think about the last show – they were really pumping themselves up: 'It's going to be great. I'm going to do my best.'

Tamara: I think they enjoy the fact that…
Martine: …they're participating in it…
Tamara: …and we're all really going through this intense process together and we're going to come out of it and love it and have fun.

1. This UK-based reggae movement had its roots in the Twelve Tribes of Israel Mansion, a Rastafari religious group. Established in 1968 by Vernon Carrington, known as Prophet Gad, the Twelve Tribes, according to academic Michael Barnett, 'embraced reggae music wholeheartedly as an intrinsic part of the Rastafari life and committed themselves to a once-monthly ritualistic reggae dance'. Bob Marley was perhaps the mansion's best-known member.

2. Lovers Rock is a softer, more sentimental and romantic style of reggae, which one of its creators, Dennis Bovell, describes as 'a new hybrid of London-based reggae and couples-dancing style'. It prominently featured female vocalists, a rarity in reggae until that point. 'I thought, "Well, Aretha Franklin is the queen of soul, why haven't we got a queen of reggae?",' Bovell has said. 'Women were being shoved to third division. So we wanted to bring them to the front.' Bovell also admitted that the style had another purpose: 'Call it smooch reggae if you like, where couples can get hold of someone and turn the lights out and get busy there. It was a purely sexual thing.'

3. Raindance claims to have organized the UK's first illegal rave, a 24-hour party in 1989. Two years later, in a circus tent in east London, it organized the first legal version. It was founded by Paul Nelson, the elder brother of Slipmatt, a key early rave DJ.

4. 'We make no false promises,' reads a flyer for an early Telepathy event. 'What we will give you is "raw to the core", underground bass in yer face and an atmosphere that's electric.' Organized by London DJ Sting (not the co-founder of The Police), the first Telepathy rave was held in Stratford, east London, on November 17, 1990. By the late 1990s, the name had become synonymous with hardcore and jungle. Among the acts that played the events was The Prodigy, which played its debut gig at a Telepathy rave in 1990.

5. Malian photographer Malick Sidibé (1935-2016) is best known for chronicling the effervescent nightlife of Bamako from the late 1950s to the 1970s and for his vibrant portraits of the inhabitants of the Bagadadji neighbourhood who would visit the photography studio he opened in 1958. 'It was like a place of make-believe,' he told the *Guardian* about Studio Malick Sidibé. 'People would pretend to be riding motorbikes, racing against each other. It was not like that at the other studios.'

6. Opened by Ole Christensen in Hampstead, north London, in 1964, the first Athena shop sold reproductions of fine-art prints and contemporary art for 36 shillings (or around £36 at 2022 prices). In 1977, with numerous branches around the country, it released 'Tennis Girl', a poster of a young female tennis player gently scratching her bare bottom. Some estimates state that up to 2 million copies of the posters were sold. (The 18-year-old model Fiona Walker was never paid for the image, which was shot by her then boyfriend.) In 1982, the company published South African-born illustrator Syd Brak's 'Long Distance Kiss', a highly airbrushed image of a woman wearing boldly colourful make-up and blowing a kiss into a bright-red telephone. Brak says the image was deliberately targeted at teenage girls who 'aspire to maturity and sophistication' and was his attempt to treat punk 'as an Italian designer would handle it'.

7. According to Strawberry Sundae's Facebook page, the club – which still organizes occasional events – was 'originally founded by Conan Corrigan, who moved to London as a cash-strapped Liverpudlian looking for work' in the early 1990s. It first opened in late 1994 in Maximus in Leicester Square, before moving to railway arches on Goding Street in Vauxhall, and later, various venues around the city. Wherever it is held, however, Strawberry Sundae always ends with the same track, Tall Paul's classic 'Rock da House', a tune that one YouTube user writes is: 'Enough to see the decking collapse at any BBQ when folk start rocking it up.'

8. Known, according to a 1998 article in the *Independent*, for its 'notoriously surly doormen' who 'try their best to complicate your entry into the club', Emporium at 62 Kingly Street, was a well-known venue for both clubbers and celebrities, and featured a 'VIP area, where all kind of capers abound'. In 2012, ex-England and Manchester United footballer Rio Ferdinand told the *Evening Standard* that Emporium was his favourite London nightclub: 'Ten years ago it was somewhere I could always have a good dance.' Emporium is now closed.

9. Gilles Peterson's club night That's How It Is – co-founded with Mo' Wax's James Lavelle – ran from 1993 until 2005 at Bar Rumba on Shaftesbury Avenue. Contrary to Martine's memory, it was held on Monday, not Thursday, nights.

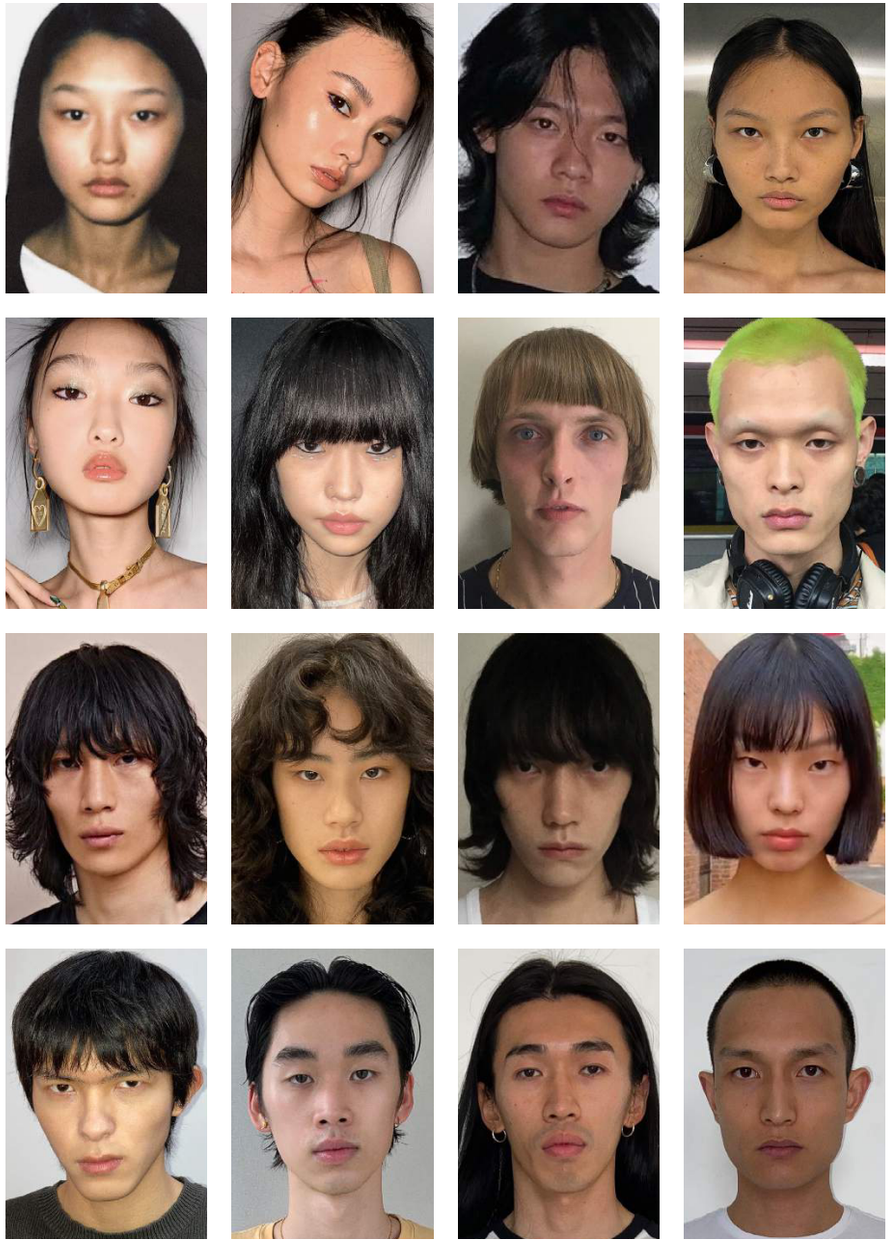
10. *The Blitz* is a documentary, originally broadcast on Sky in the UK, about the group of fashionable young men and women, including Stephen Jones, Boy George, Midge Ure, Stephen Linard, and Sade, who attended Steve Strange (later of Visage) and Rusty Egan's Tuesday club night in 1979 to 1980. Beginning in a basement bar called Billy's in London's Soho, it later moved to the Blitz nightclub in Covent Garden, and was celebrated for its strict, yet outrageous and flamboyant dress code.

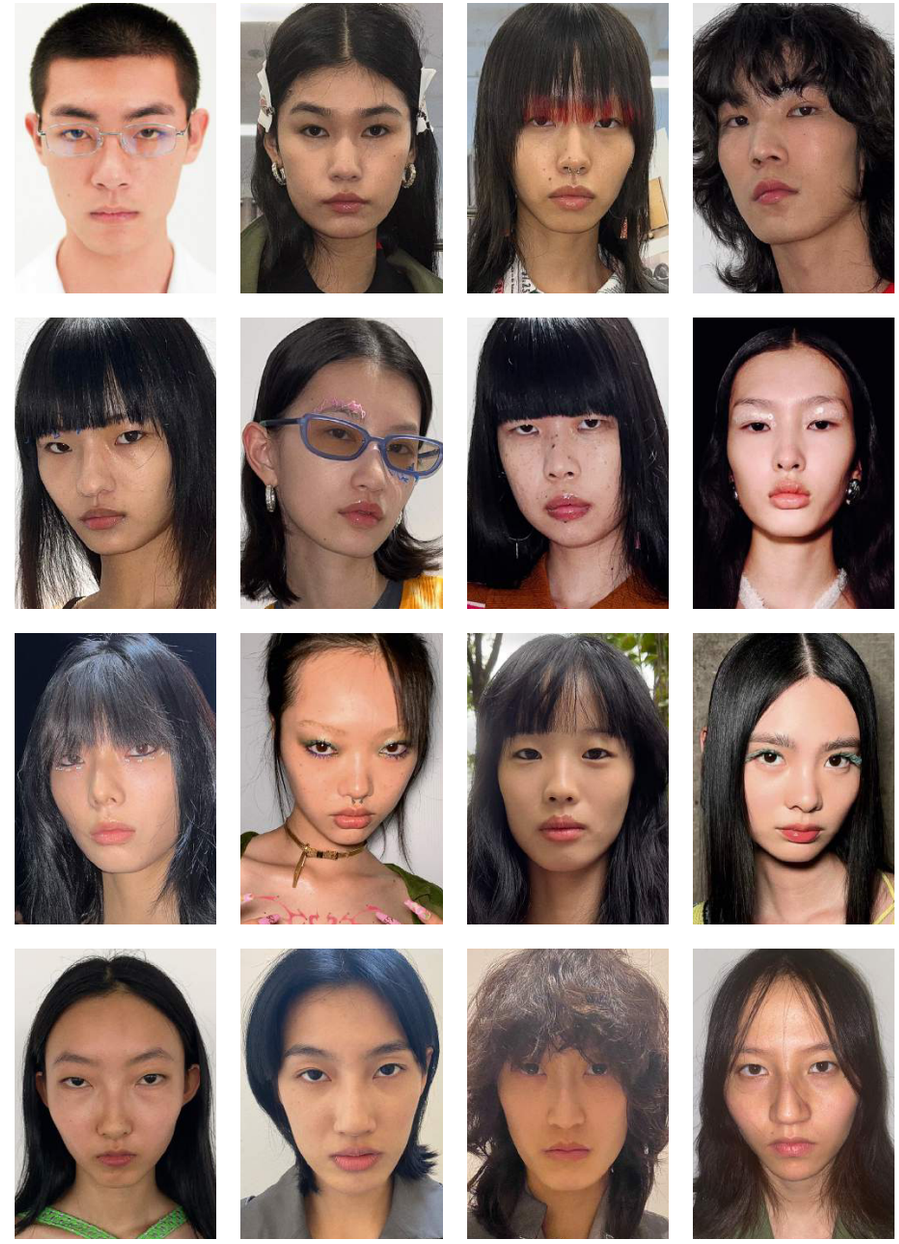
11. Tomorrow is a showroom and a company that works with brands to 'champion and foster the power of entrepreneurial activity' and support them 'through digitally-enhanced [sic] b2b and omnichannel b2c'.

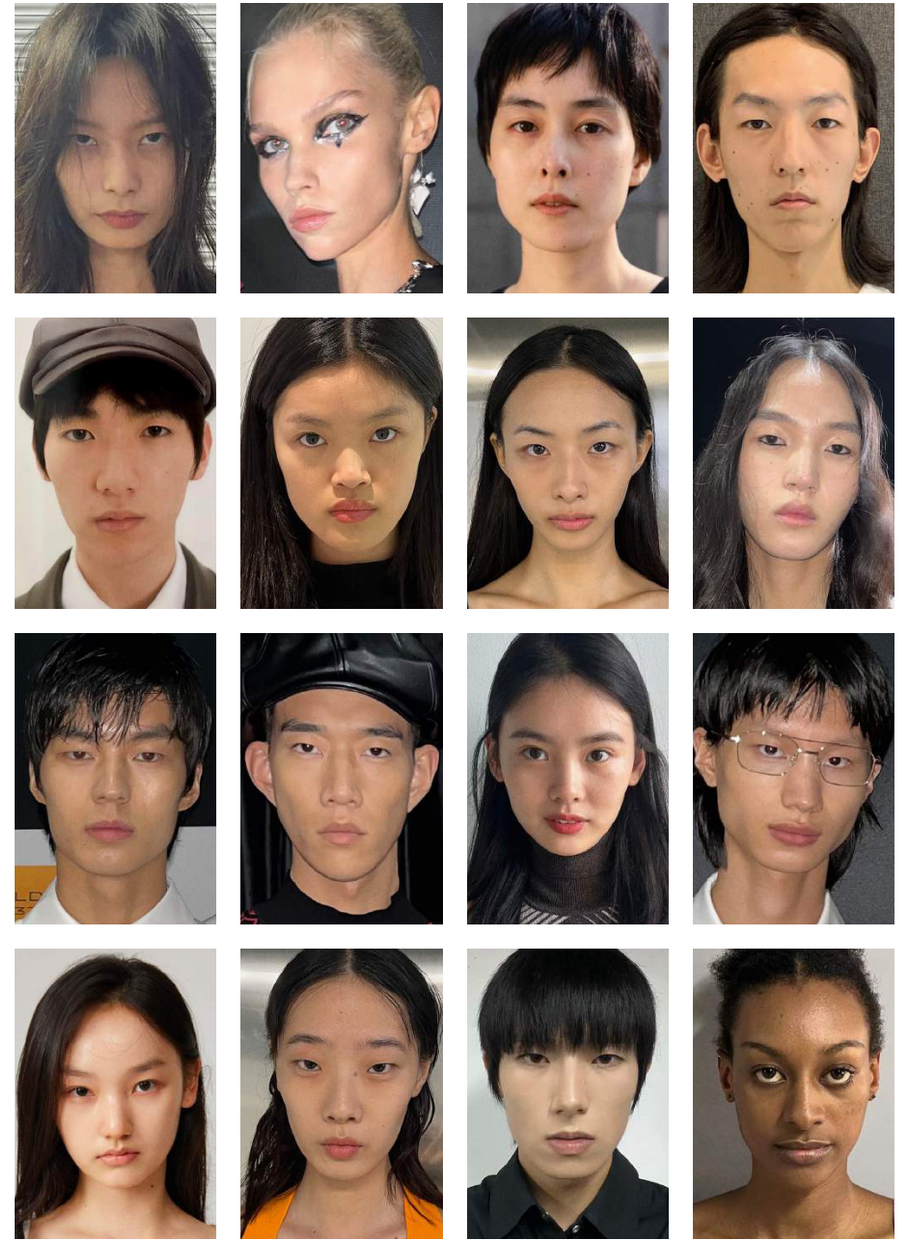
‘Why did you choose them? They’re not even pretty!’

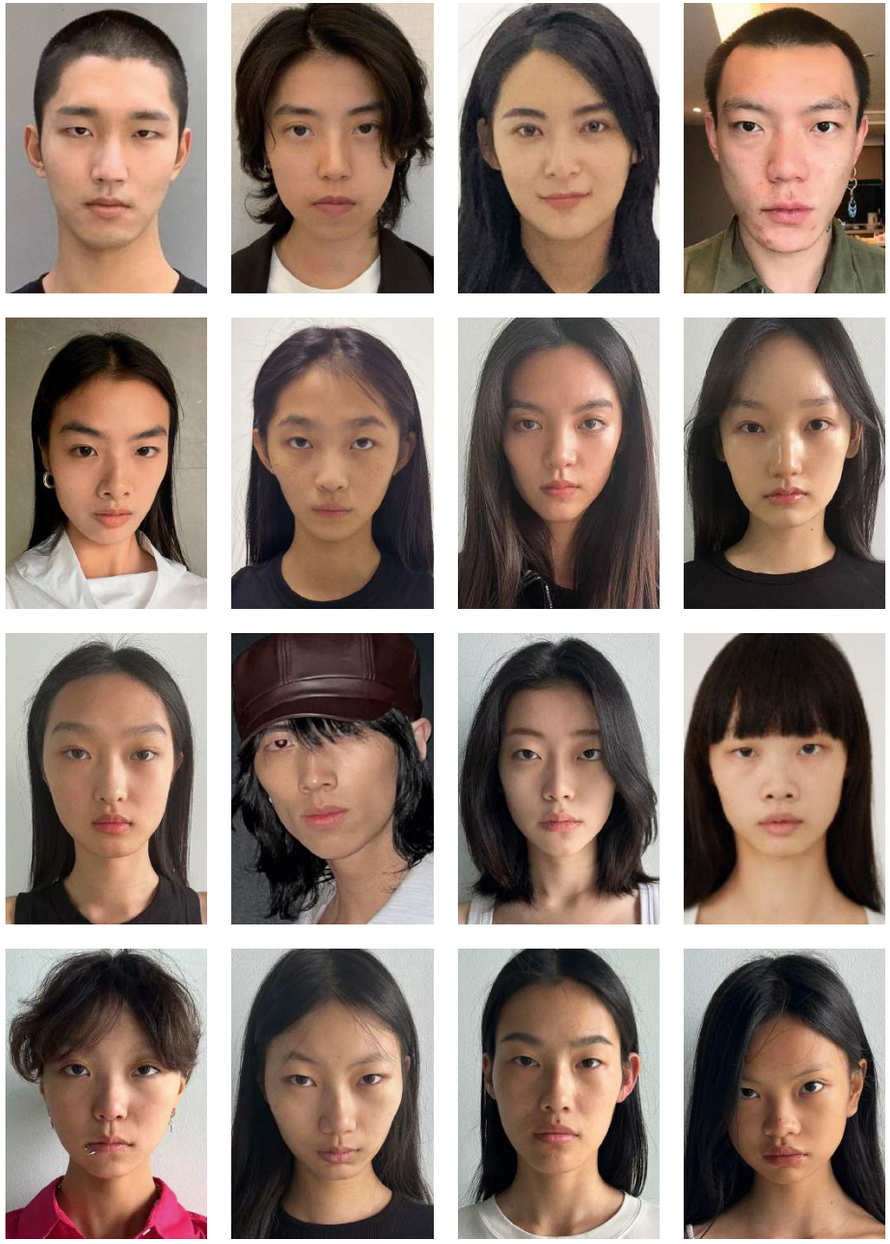
Chinese casting director Denise Hu on bridging the gap between local identity and Western model standards.

Interview by Blake Abbie
Portrait by Yi Tuo









Denise Hu might currently be one of the fashion industry's most powerful casting directors, yet few people outside of China know her name. Working in what is undisputedly the fashion world's powerhouse economy, Hu's eye is guiding who Chinese people see on their billboards and ultimately influencing where their money goes. Hu has worked on countless mini-campaigns with Loewe, Bottega Veneta, Fendi and other Western luxury brands to make sure clients – both in China and in the Chinese diaspora – know where to shop for important gifting festivals, such as Lunar New Year and the multiple Valentine's Days. She has also worked on the commercially crucial restaging of European runway shows for Chinese clients and editors unable to leave the country due to Covid restrictions. Working with European designers is only half of the equation, however; Hu is also helping to establish what it means to be – and look – Chinese. Her casting for designers such as Xander Zhou, Xu Zhi, and VII Victor X Wang is creating a national dialogue while becoming an important cultural export. With Chinese consumers caring about what is being sold to them and how they are represented internationally, Hu must find the delicate balance of who the market wants to see and who aligns creatively with a brand or editorial.

27-year-old Hu started her career street casting – which is how we first connected when she cast me for a runway project – but in 2011 moved to the UK to study fashion design. Quickly realizing that sewing was not going to be her path, she moved back to China and began working in casting almost by accident.

Blake Abbie: How did you get into casting?

Denise Hu: Officially with Yang Li, when he and stylist Ellie Grace Cumming came to China in 2017 to shoot a book with the French photographer, Antoine d'Agata. We had a mutual friend in the UK, and I ended up helping with casting on the project. We shot every day in Beijing for two or three weeks. It was crazy and exciting. A lot of people from all over China came to Beijing for the shoot. It was all street-cast people with probably only five to ten professional models.

Street casting was also how you started working with Balenciaga, wasn't it?

Exactly. Walter Pearce [from Midland casting agency] asked me to help out for Balenciaga back when Lotta Volkova was casting. We knew each other from Instagram and we street-scouted together in Shanghai at the beginning of 2018. Walter needed someone who knew the underground clubs and other places where cool people hung out. The following seasons were with Léopold Duchemin; we went to so many different cities in China and also Korea. We had a good time working together. Walter had already been to China to cast a shoot with Feng Li and Vanessa Reid for *System*. He posted something on Instagram saying he needed models, so I sent him some people I knew in Chengdu where they were shooting. Walter was wanting to street cast, but the production company they were working with didn't understand what street casting meant. They didn't understand why Walter was looking for people on the street.

When did this shift towards 'street casting' start in China?

Probably about five years ago. Most Chinese productions and clients thought it was strange to find people on the street to model for them. Traditionally, they would really only look at modelling agencies. The people who sent out casting calls were only there to organize with the agencies and wouldn't be asked for any creative input by the clients. Nowadays, that's changed. I often get requests for '素人感模特' – which can be translated as 'amateur-feeling model' or a 'street-cast look'.

How is casting viewed in China?

In China, the role of casting director has never really been considered a standalone job. Casting is often combined with other responsibilities like producer, show director, stylist or consulting editor. At the end of September during Shanghai Fashion Week, I had a client who asked me to manage the entire backstage of their runway show: 'I just want to contact you, one person, for the whole project, for the models and catering – the whole backstage!' Clients sometimes think all things related to models is my job, but I can't do that! Some of my clients still don't recognize my job, so when I bill them they'll ask me to write 'producer' on my invoice or it won't go through because casting isn't in the budget.

How do the open-call castings work for runways?

When we cast for a client like Gucci – when they did the reshow of its *Aria* collection in Shanghai in 2021, for example – we have all the 'professional' models fly in from all over the country. The client pays for any travel expenses and a per diem. For a show like that with 100 models, we probably see about 600 people in two days by going through all the photos and PDFs of all the models in China and some online casting. Then we select around 300 to see in person. There are shows in China that can have up to 350 looks sometimes now!

China is incredibly diverse ethnically. In casting for the Chinese market, is there a requirement to represent China in a specific way?

It's actually quite open, which might surprise the West. The requests from a lot of clients are for diversity. Other than the Han majority, China has 55 ethnic minorities and clients here want to be able to book people from places like Tibet or Xinjiang, different faces that may not be the 'Chinese' in the way Western people think. Especially when casting groups of models, each person can stand for a different market segment. I think that's what touches different types of people and makes them feel they're also part of fashion and its magic. Clients are also open to different body shapes, plus-sized or shorter models, definitely in commercial campaigns or magazines but also on runways. This is really why clients want to work with me. Everyone has access to agencies' rosters online now, so clients need someone who knows people outside the industry – not really even just someone who is able to do street casting, but someone who has the network of key opinion leaders [KOLs], influencers, or talents like dancers, DJs or musicians. Chinese clients now actually require a wide range of people. I was just working on this show for Peacebird, one of China's largest high-street brands, and they asked me for football players, frisbee players, musicians, models, and of course, KOLs. People, especially consumers in big cities, want to see different types of people. They don't want to see everything only on supermodels because that's not how they are themselves.

In the early 2000s in China, the covers of magazines like *Vogue China*, which launched in 2005, featured only supermodels.

For China, it was supermodels first and then came the superstars, like actors and musicians. Look at supermodels like Emma Pei and Jerry Fu from that era though, and compare them to current supermodels – a new type of beauty of China has been discovered. Also, everyone can be a star now with social media – there are so many talented people!

There are more and more KOLs on runways and in campaigns in China, too.

All the shows I've done recently have had KOLs. The last runway I cast was for DNT – Do Not Tag, a brand started by Han Huohuo, a famous blogger from the early 2000s. His goal was to get the runway onto Weibo Hot Search – the trending topics of the day – so we had a few celebrities and a lot of KOLs walk the show. There were probably fewer than 10 professional models out 66 looks. The models are definitely starting to feel the competition.

How do you find models?

I look at model agencies, of course, but also on the street, in nightclubs – anywhere! They're friends or friends of friends, and of course, I also look on social-media platforms, like Xiaohongshu, and WeChat posts. Anyone can be cast. Do you know how professional models get signed to an agency?

There are modelling competitions…

And there are also university courses called 'clothing performance' – models go to university to study.

Which universities have modelling courses?

A lot of them, at least four in Shanghai, but they're all over the country. Agencies visit these universities and fashion schools to select models from these courses. I've asked what they learn there and was told: how to walk, how to present yourself, English, and just a little bit of art history. It's easy for these young models to apply because they're tall and skinny. That's the main requirement.

I suspect that for many people this is the only way to be discovered.

Maybe, but also in China, anyone can give anyone a job. It's not like it's only the production or modelling agencies that can give the casting director a job. Anyone can give a model a job. The model can give a photographer a job. That's what it's like in China now. Everyone is giving someone else a job as long as they get their commission. Anyone could be anyone's agent. So far it's only in China; we're not letting anything

'Consumers in big Chinese cities want to see different types of people. They don't only want supermodels because that's not how they see themselves.'

'Models in China go to university to study 'clothing performance' – they're taught how to walk, how to present yourself, English, and a bit of art history.'

come in and we're not really letting things out. At the moment, it seems like we're just playing with ourselves!

Is there a difference in how a Western client or a Chinese client sees models?
Western clients generally know what they want. When they see model videos, they don't even need to see people in person because they have a more defined understanding of what they want. For some of my Chinese clients, I really have to help them to clarify what exactly they are looking for. There is definitely a difference between the two in terms of what beauty is.

What is Chinese beauty?
I think the most attractive part of Chinese beauty is that it's not too much, not too little, just right – reserved, subtle, thought-provoking. There's a difference between high-end fashion and commercial beauty. It's always about finding the balance. Working with clients here, they probably want some edgy people, but not too edgy. There's definitely a line, but Chinese commercial clients are keener on conventional beauty that the mainstream market will understand: elegant, sweet, young. For Western clients – and this has happened a few times – they'll like a certain type of person and then people in China will be like, 'Why were they chosen? What's so special about them?' Some people might consider them not beautiful, possibly even ugly. When we did the scouting for Balenciaga, there were some models we chose who Chinese agencies asked: 'Why did you choose them? They're not pretty or anything.'

Do you find there's a disconnect between the Chinese market and its casting needs and Western markets?
Some brands divide their marketing campaigns. For larger first-tiered cities like Shanghai, Beijing, and Hangzhou, they'll use a China-focused 'high-fashion' campaign with Chinese models, and for second- or third-tiered cities, they'll probably choose a campaign with Western models or models with big eyes and sweet faces that are traditionally 'beautiful'. People online in China can be quite critical about models with small eyes. 'Why are they in the campaigns? We want to see beautiful people in China.' That kind of thinking is quite controversial because a lot of the good models, even like Ju Xiaowen, have smaller eyes. In 2021, Mercedes-Benz had an advertisement with a model with smaller eyes and netizens thought the company was perpetuating a stereotype that Western people have about Chinese faces. The backlash to that one photo was so bad that they had to pull the ad.

These kinds of stories definitely show how powerful and influential the online Chinese community is. They can really drive brands to actively change course.
Yes. After the Mercedes ad, quite a lot of my Chinese clients told me they want only bigger-eyed models.

How is it to cast and work with KOLs and celebrities?
Some of the celebrities can be quite picky, really tricky, but most of the KOLs and celebrities are quite easy to work with. Did you see issue zero of *Perfect* magazine? There's a story with five young Chinese actresses that I cast with stylist Jeff Lee. We had a lot of fun with them, even if one was a bit pretentious. When they were trying black lipstick on her, she was really not happy. 'Models service the clothes, but the clothes service the actor', her agency told us after the shoot, but that's not quite right. [Laughs] Most celebrities I've worked with so far have been fine to work with, but they do care about who they stand next to. If they are in a lineup, they can't be on the ends, or if they were walking out in the finale of a runway, they have to be in the middle, definitely not on the sides!

I was thinking about all the campaigns for all these shopping festivals, like Chinese New Year, Chinese Valentine's Day, and 520. There are so many and brands rely on them for a massive portion of their revenue.
Yes, I've done loads of these campaigns; they're quite interesting. This time last year, I cast the global Chinese New Year campaign with H&M. We shot around 40 people in China and it was seen everywhere. I'm currently working on the Bottega Veneta Chinese New Year campaigns for next year.

You worked on Bottega Veneta's most recent Chinese Valentine's Day campaign in August, with the straight, lesbian and gay couples.
Yes, they're not kissing or hugging each other; they're just smiling couples on leisurely bike rides together. But you can see they're real couples, right? It's great how we found a way to present this love almost vaguely – but not that vaguely at all.

While there are no laws about sexuality in China, there are government 'requirements'. Do you find it difficult to work around these?
The LGBTQIA+ community is quite big in China, and people want to express themselves. So I really don't think we should shy away from it. Smaller designers shoot Pride campaigns, but more mainstream brands like Li-Ning or Nike might still be wary of doing that.

Are there things that you're explicitly asked not to do?
We don't shoot people smoking cigarettes in magazines, and no tattoos. It does kind of depend on the publication or brand, though. For a magazine like *Nylon* it could be fine, but probably not for *Vogue* or any bigger brand. For some models it might be fine to have tattoos, but for celebrities it's not. The singer and actress Faye Wong's daughter, Leah Dou, who is a musician, always has her face tattoo retouched, even in videos. A lot of people have tattoos in China; it's very normal now. During a really 'sensitive' time, models and celebrities couldn't even have bleached hair. I'm not happy about it, but I wouldn't personally get myself into trouble by pushing against these regulations because it's not something I can change.

Do you think things will change?
Before 2004 it was open, but now it's getting to this point where people *have* to explore where they can. We can see what's happening in the outside world and we do our best considering the requirements. Chinese people are actually really open-minded. We have a lot of other things we can try to do. It's funny how everything is actually out there, how we're actually having fun – but have to pretend we're not.

'I think the most attractive part of Chinese beauty is that it's not too much, not too little, just right – reserved, subtle, thought-provoking.'

‘80% of our students go on to work in brands’ studios.’

At La Cambre Mode[s] fashion school in Brussels, it’s about the Stockman and sewing machine, not the iPad or 3D printer.

Text and interviews by Marta Represa
Photographs by Jorre Janssens

It's easy to walk past La Cambre Mode[s] fashion school without really noticing it. The austere 1970s concrete building in Brussels's Ixelles district, with its inconspicuous entrance and bare interiors, gives little away. Yet, its teaching methods, alumni and faculty have helped define fashion – especially in Paris – for over three decades. Part of the École nationale supérieure des arts visuels de La Cambre – established by Belgian painter Henry van de Velde in 1926 – the school has generated some of the most in-demand designer talent in the industry since it was launched in 1986. Along the way, it has become a formidable competitor to many of the world's longer-established fashion schools, thanks to a pragmatic, no-nonsense ethos that focuses on the technical aspects of design and creation.

On the fifth to twelfth floors of the building on Avenue Louise – accessible in a cranky elevator – are a series of luminous spaces, filled with small groups of busy students, from first-year undergraduates to second-year master's candidates, gathered around cutting tables and Stockman tailor's dummies, draping fabric, cutting patterns, sewing and hand-embroidering, or pinning reference images on the white walls. With time, some will be recruited by the biggest fashion design studios in Paris and Milan. Some may indeed follow in the footsteps of La Cambre graduates such as Anthony Vaccarello, Matthieu Blazy, Olivier Theyskens, Julien Dossena, Marine Serre, and Nicolas Di Felice.

***System* spoke to Tony Delcampe, himself an alumnus and head of fashion at La Cambre since 1999, about his vision for the school and why it produces so many promising designers. We then invited some of the current crop of undergraduates to present their work and answer our 'Future Systems' questionnaire. Finally, to complete the circle, they submitted questions to the alumni designer stars to answer – all in the quest to find out 'What makes La Cambre Mode[s] so unique?'**

Guiding La Cambre Mode[s] is Tony Delcampe, the head of fashion since 1999. His office seems to reflect the school's ethos: a no-frills space filled with useful fashion books and heaps of magazines covering shelves, tables and chairs. ('We just had a flood,' he explains, 'I had to rescue all the mags.') Teachers regularly pop in and out for coffee as we talk. Relaxed and direct, dressed in black and an army jacket, Tony perfectly embodies the school's mindset. 'Quite simply,' he says, 'we are here to teach students to make clothes and to think fashion, and then to use that to add something of value to contemporary culture.'

Marta Represa: You and La Cambre have a long history. What's your story with the school, and what did you do before taking over as head of fashion?

Tony Delcampe: I was a student here myself. I began in 1989, three years after the fashion department was founded. I already had a BA in textile design from the Académie de Beaux-Arts in Tournai. I completed my MA in 1994 and immediately set up a brand with my friend Sandrine Rombaux, who now also teaches here. The front and back of our clothes were completely different, kind of like two separate pieces, and hidden in between the layers of fabric was our label, which bore a sort of Dadaist conversation: 'Sandrine: "Comment tu la trouves?", Tony: "Quoi?", Sandrine: "Au milieu dos"'. [Sandrine: 'How do you find it?', Tony: 'What?', Sandrine: 'In the middle of the back.'] It was all extremely Belgian, even if we showed in Paris and were sold at Barneys. I was also doing consulting work and in 1998, began teaching second-year students at La Cambre part-time. Eighteen months later, Franc' Pairon, who was then head of fashion, suggested I take over, as she was moving on to Paris's IFM. I did have a lot of doubts, but eventually I admitted the truth to myself: I enjoyed passing on knowledge more than participating in the fashion industry. I decided to go full time here in the year 2000; it's been 22 years since, and I haven't changed my mind, especially in the current fashion climate.

Tell me about the philosophy of the fashion programme. What makes La Cambre different from other schools?

Above all, we are pragmatic. We're looking to make intelligent fashion, not to fantasize, sketch or create mood boards. Straightaway in their first year, our students learn to work three-dimensionally; they actually draw very little. Our exercises usually go from the Stockman dummy to the cutting table, and then back again to the dummy. The last thing I want is for my students to dream up grandiose projects that are impossible to achieve and so ultimately useless. I mean, dreaming is important, of course, but at the end of the day we're making clothes, and clothes should be a reflection of the world we're living in. They should be thoughtful, as opposed to merely pretty or impressive, especially today. The more the focus is on pretty models, monumental sets and hype, the less important clothes become. We need to keep rethinking fashion, and that's our main goal in the school.

What is the profile of an average student? How do you go about selecting them for the programme?

We are immensely lucky to be a publicly funded school, so our students only have to pay, at most and if they're not on a scholarship, around €300 a year. That gives us total freedom when it comes to the selection process, which lasts about a week in early September. For the first 20-minute interview, we ask potential students to bring 10 images they like, including a contemporary artist, an artwork, a muse, and a place. The goal is to get an idea of the creative universe they inhabit, its common thread, their knowledge about it, and their interest in fashion. Then, they are asked to draw ten looks inspired by those images, to see the ways in which they can translate a concept into a garment. It's a tough process. This year, for instance, we had 180 applications for the BA programme, and retained only 14 people. This means there are never more than 50 or 60 students in the whole fashion department and allows the faculty to work with them on an almost one-on-one basis, especially on the MA programme. As for the students' profiles, there isn't really a single one. They come from different backgrounds, have different interests and cultural references, which again results from us being a public school. They all have talent in common, though, as well as the desire to learn the techniques that will allow them to become exceptional creatives. I mean, you can't come up with a new way to deconstruct a shirt if you don't know by heart how a shirt is constructed, can you?

'We are pragmatic at La Cambre. We're looking to make intelligent fashion three-dimensionally, not to fantasize, sketch or create mood boards.'

What are their professional ambitions? Do they match yours?
I feel like ambition in fashion has become a bigger word the more visible and 'cool' the industry has become in the cultural landscape. When I entered the school, I knew textile design. I collected issues of *i-D* and *The Face*; I looked up to Dries Van Noten, Ann Demeulemeester and Martin Margiela who, mind you, were fresh out of school themselves. Nowadays, applicants come to us saying they want to become the next Kim Kardashian or Kanye West, and that's on social media. We tend to go for the people who might have less lofty goals, but do have an impressive knowledge of fashion. I can't really think of any individual ambitions my students might have – except maybe one of our second-years, who taught himself to drape, cut and sew because he worships Rick Owens – but I think, as a general rule, neither do they. They're here to find that out, while simultaneously figuring out their style and their creative affinities. I certainly don't get the impression they are all dead set on becoming the next Anthony Vaccarello.

Which jobs do most students go on to get? What percentage of them become designers versus other industry or industry-adjacent professions?
Our priority is to form designers, that's for sure. We want to forge creatives, the kind of people who can find new things to say through clothes or new ways of crafting them. That is our main goal. All the mental gymnastics we teach our students to do around fashion and fashion imagery are geared towards acquiring the kind of skills needed in order to become a creative director. Take, for instance, someone like Marine Serre; what she is doing today is just a natural evolution of what she was doing as an MA student. We encourage that through group exercises or making students work for each other, which they really appreciate. Plus, they all have four internships, lasting three and six months, and, ultimately, a full year, in some of the most prominent *maisons* and brands in the industry. Ultimately, I'd say around 10% of our students go on to become creative directors, while the rest find jobs in studios, doing different, specialized work like, say, tailoring or *flou* at Louis Vuitton. They often find those jobs straight after their graduation show, for which 50% of the jury comes from industry positions. Then, of course, there are those who choose to establish their own brand, like Marine Serre or Ester Manas. And, while we love it and support them on their journey, we stay realistic and clear-headed about it. Starting your own brand requires a special kind of courage when the competition is way bigger than you, or awash with cash and connections. Making it takes so much more than talent; it's about the right contacts, the right timing, the right PR, and never forget, people have to make a living. I absolutely get it. Of course, there are the occasional – although not so rare – cases in which MA graduates go on to become musicians or yoga teachers or, like one recent graduate, a sustainability consultant.

Do you have a traditional approach to fashion in terms of skills? What place should technology have in the school?
I'm certainly not a Luddite, but education is not the same as working in a company, especially not in a public school. We struggle with funding, I mean, look at our computers; they're practically historical artefacts! For a while our heating system broke down and we were teaching in temperatures of five or six degrees for months on end, so we're definitely not thinking about getting 3D printers or iPads any time soon. I must say I'm a bit suspicious of schools that lure students in with fancy equipment. After all, we're here to teach the ABC of fashion design; what else do you need for that besides a Stockman dummy, an industrial sewing machine, and a cutting table? Technological innovations and advancements are without a doubt great in a work context, but they must be driven by creativity. Also, technology in the fashion industry is usually handled by specialists. So I don't worry too much about it. It's a bit like sustainability: we can do the basics here with recycling and buying fabric scraps, but sustainability on an industrial level is a whole different ball game.

'Applicants come to us saying they want to become the next Kim Kardashian or Kanye West. We tend to go for the people who have less lofty goals.'

Apart from the design and technical courses, what is the conceptual approach to fashion in the programme?
We are part of the École nationale des arts visuels de La Cambre and our programme is undeniably defined by the fact that it's a multidisciplinary school. We are a reflection of that, since our students take several core courses in other programmes. All our design and technical classes are concentrated in the first three days of the week. Then, on Thursdays and Fridays, students learn life drawing, painting and perspective, and of course, theoretical subjects, including art history, philosophy, music history, literature, and semantics. The faculty for those courses comes from different universities in Brussels, which makes for a really complete curriculum. That conceptual approach is essential, in my opinion, to develop the mind-to-hand connection that allows them to express their thoughts creatively.

Do you focus on equipping the students with a broader understanding of the fashion industry, especially its business side? Or would you rather keep the programme purely creative?
We don't teach them anything about the fashion industry's business side – they will learn about that after graduating or during their internships. Student life, in general, has nothing to do with the realities of the fashion industry. Take their seasonal schedules, for instance: here, they get to spend a whole year on one collection, which is a complete fiction in the working world. So as we are in a fictional world in terms of collection schedules, why not be for everything else as well? We don't discuss marketing, money, targeting, and collection plans; I know others do, but I have always feared that would somewhat limit our students' creativity. Plus, it's hardly going to be their job as fashion designers. Do you know of any great fashion designer throughout history who was also a financial genius?

Not that they'll be required to do their own bookkeeping, but are they aware that the realities of the industry are completely different to school?
At least when it comes to the big houses' studios, I actually don't think those realities are that different. With their mammoth teams and budgets, what is the reality of these *maisons* anyway? Obviously, it's different for those who go on to establish their own brand, but you have to keep in mind that around 80% of La Cambre's students go on to work in brands' studios, so what we concentrate on are the skills to make them particularly competitive in that environment – and that takes an enormous amount of time and effort. I'm talking classes from 9am to 6pm, plus all the work they do outside of school. There is a time limit on what we can teach, so we prioritize what makes the school successful within the industry.

Do you feel like fashion's current over-reliance on social media is affecting the way students design?
Luckily, we very rarely have to remind students fashion's ultimate goal is not virality. I think that's because we focus on 3D design from the start. If you are used to working on a Stockman, hopefully you've understood that clothes are meant to be looked at from all angles, not just the front. It's clear social media is having an impact on students nowadays; it's inevitable. Social media can be fun and great, but the sort of channel-hopping behaviour that often comes with it can be detrimental. It means young people are being overfed images, shows, and editorials that are completely detached from any context or reference points. That simply leads to the death of fashion culture, so sometimes we do have to push them to research dates, historical and social contexts and styles attached to what they see online.

Do you keep in touch with the school's alumni?
Yes! It is really important to me to stay informed about our alumni's journeys, and I'm lucky to stay in touch with a lot of them regularly, from junior designers at Saint Laurent and Louis Vuitton to the ones who have gone on to become creative directors. Many of them have come back to the school as part of the end-of-year show jury in the past few years, from Marine Serre and Cédric Charlier – who has gone on to become Uniqlo's head of design – to Julien Dossena and Anthony Vaccarello. It's funny when I think back to how I didn't initially accept Anthony as a student here and recommended he study textile design and then reapply. We did select him on his second attempt, and now look at what he has achieved. The last time he came over, he travelled by jet. So many different styles, realities and professional pathways, but all united by their talent and what they bring to today's fashion conversation.

‘Nothing should be taboo, and if my collection allows people to talk about sex swings or pillories as a possibility, then I’m happy. Make love, not war.’

Dylan Guillard, 28

Tell us about your collection.
This collection started with research into the subject of baskets. They often come with leather straps, which led me into the world of fetishism. I then had fun mixing the codes of the ‘modern man’ with well-finished objects, going into object fetishism à la Patrick Bateman [in 1991 novel *American Psycho*] and sexual practices. Fashion was much hornier in the late 1990s and early 2000s, with Gaultier, Mugler, Tom Ford or McQueen. My ambition is about understanding how to communicate desires before sexualizing a body. Nothing should be taboo, and if my collection allows people to talk about sex swings or pillories as a possibility, then I’m happy. Make love, not war.

What’s the best thing about La Cambre Mode[s]?
The best thing is the teaching that pushes us away from the garment, so then we can come back to it with a completely new vision. This enables us to find principles and concepts that we wouldn’t have thought of in the first place. It frees us from all the issues of marketing.

Which person in fashion do you most admire, and why?
It’s very difficult to answer that with just one name, impossible even. First off, I’d say Jean Paul Gaultier for being the man he is. He’s always done what he wanted to do and I admire him for that. Our generation only knows a tiny part of his work because of the lack of archives, but it seems celebratory, without any commercial worries. Then I would say Martin Margiela who is the king of concept, and McQueen for his attention to detail and his references. And now Demna for all the issues he deals with.

What can younger designers express through fashion that designers from an older generation cannot?
Designers from older generations weren’t as scared as we are thinking about what the future might look like. None of my friends want to have children because they’re scared of bringing them into an unstable world, which could collapse at any moment. Designers of my generation have grown up watching anxiety-provoking but real news. Our sense of ethical responsibility is ingrained. It’s up to us to break the cycle and to share an awareness that should be generalized.

Finally, where do you see yourself professionally in five years’ time?
Five years goes by very quickly. I hope to join a house that shares my convictions, where my creativity isn’t restricted, and where I can climb the ladder – because I like being challenged. And above all, I hope to have as much fun as I do now.

‘The collection is based around the kind of stereotypical male uniforms we all grow up with – sailor, biker, cowboy, suited businessman – while reinterpreting them as female figures.’

Florent Seligmann, 26

Tell us about your collection.
The collection is entitled *Handle With Care*, and is based around the kind of stereotypical male uniforms we all grow up with – sailor, biker, cowboy, suited businessman – while reinterpreting them as female figures. It’s an X-ray of archetypal looks in which clothing is reduced to its essential codes. It is a play on the proportions of the classics we all know. It’s like an exaggeration of a parody.

What’s the best thing about La Cambre Mode[s]?
The five-year process. Each year is an important part of the construction that allows you to understand what a personal collection is.

Which person in fashion do you most admire, and why?
Rei Kawakubo. I don’t know how she does it but she impresses me every time with her volumes and shapes. It is anti-fashion in a sense, very punk energy.

What can younger designers express through fashion that those from an older generation cannot?
Hopefully the younger generation will make some impact with the slow-fashion process. The way people consume fashion has completely changed over the past 20 years. Everything is so quick now that as soon as your collection is out, it’s instantly digested by social media.

Finally, where do you see yourself professionally in five years’ time?
I hope I will be able to work with an amazing team of creatives who challenge me to always try new things. Wherever that will be.

‘The school is free and doesn’t have a big budget, so we are always having to find collaborative or craft solutions to push our projects further, to the same level as students who have every possible kind of machine around.’

Pauline Haumont, 27

Tell us about your collection.
It was less a collection and more a series of 10 objects, 10 looks. The concept is around love and the relationships that it has to symbols such as flowers. Flowers are the best love language, and their different states can be different emblems of love. My parents went through a divorce – one more – which still affects me personally, as well as affecting my general idea of love and marriage. The objects are about the materiality of love and how people use objects to prove it to themselves and others.

What’s the best thing about La Cambre Mode[s]?
The proximity to the teachers; we have a one-on-one lesson about our ideas every week. We do collective work with our classmates and sometimes other classes, which means we get objective advice. The school is free and doesn’t have a big budget, so we are always having to find collaborative or craft solutions to push our projects further, to the same level as students who have every possible kind of machine around.

Which person in fashion do you most admire, and why?
It’s hard to limit it to just one person, but I would say Martin Margiela for his conscious and his overarching vision of the garment as an object of study. He is still so contemporary – both aesthetically and conceptually – even if a lot of what he did is now 30 years old.

What can younger designers express through fashion that those from an older generation cannot?
I appreciate how the older generation has built classics and suitable resources for us. As young designers, we deconstruct and reconstruct endlessly. We’ve now taken the power from the older generation to continue to use fashion to communicate about and question human progress, rights, feelings, insecurities and pride. We just communicate it differently and faster; everything is so accessible for everyone now or at least people are made to think that it is. We have to take advantage of that as a source of communicative power to push our ideas further. Moreover, we have more ethical responsibility than past generations.

Finally, where do you see yourself professionally in five years’ time?
I can see myself in a team still developing creative garments and meeting people I can learn with and from. I can’t wait to have access to the technological and financial resources that come with a fashion house. That, plus further learning and expanding my vision in different media, while travelling to discover as much as I can from others and different practices.

‘I don’t think there’s any form of expression that age would inhibit.’

Raquel Van Oost, 23

Tell us about your collection.
A video called *The Office Shaman*, made by John Feodorov in 2000, was my starting point. In it, the office becomes the natural environment for the shaman. To build this collection, I put together a creative protocol for myself, which began with office supplies in several aspects – object, utility, materials. Each look was a response to the one that preceded it.

What’s the best thing about La Cambre Mode[s]?
Throughout the course, we’re taught different ways of developing our designs both formally and conceptually. We are given the opportunity to build ourselves artistically. In parallel to this creative aspect, there’s the technical education that helps us to understand how garments function and their logic, and how to make our own designs.

Which person in fashion do you most admire, and why?
This is a tricky question because there are direct inspirations like Loewe, Vivienne Westwood, Y/Project, but then there are also the people I admire for their career paths, their ways of building themselves and approaching the world around them.

What can younger designers express through fashion that those from an older generation cannot?
I don’t think there’s any form of expression that age would inhibit. On the other hand, we’re a generation that grew up with the Internet and that makes us a very politicized and committed generation with resources that are perhaps more accessible.

Finally, where do you see yourself professionally in five years’ time?
I trust my tarot to tell me.

‘I have always been drawn to the sense of drama that garments can carry. Approaching clothing as a story, not as a product, but a social disguise, a second skin.’

Romain Bichot, 24

Tell us about your collection.
Last year’s collection, *Call Me If You Get Lost*, was a nightly stroll through the city that both translated an innate sense of fear and invited you to break free of it. It was like a victim thrown into the city, who then melted into the pavements and became fixtures in the streets as a defence mechanism. Each look embodies a figure of fear, so as to escape it. I would define my work as dramatic, both in my way of working and my frame of references. It’s highly visual, looking for fundamental forms, often with film stills as a point of departure. I start with an image and circle around it, immerse myself into its atmosphere, in order to dissociate and then retranscribe it. My work embodies this theatrical notion, and I work a lot by imagining stories, characters or environments. I have always been drawn to the sense of drama that garments can carry. Approaching clothing as a story, not as a product, a social disguise, a second skin.

What’s the best thing about La Cambre Mode[s]?
The environment – you are always pushed to exceed your limits. La Cambre is a small school, and unlike elsewhere, we have no state-of-the-art technology or substantial infrastructure supporting us. But that’s where the course’s strength lies. We are stimulated in our thinking to go beyond our means. La Cambre has nourished my sense of independence and identity by balancing strong guidance with being left to my own devices.

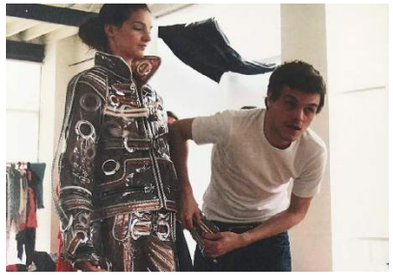
Which person in fashion do you most admire, and why?
Many, so it’s hard to pick one. I think those I admire most are not necessarily from the world of fashion itself. My thoughts go more towards iconic characters, movies, images and attitudes – from extravagant, Botoxed royalty to ordinary people I cross in the streets.

What can younger designers express through fashion that those from an older generation cannot?
Garbage is the new chic. Fewer Karl Lagerfelds, more Harrie Bradshaws! Creative expression is not defined by generations, but by a willingness to open your eyes. It is not up to me to lecture older generations; I think we can all learn from one another.

Finally, where do you see yourself professionally in five years’ time?
On a $130-million yacht, sailing off into the sunset, scribbling out the essence of my next pre-season collection on an alligator-skin couch, a coupe of Champagne between each of my toes. More seriously, the notion of time and the artisanal are important to my process. I attach great importance to the tiniest details, which is also the strength of my work. Later on, I intend to keep this same level of involvement in the creation of a garment, which, I hope, might lead me to couture.

‘What’s your best memory of being at La Cambre?’

***System* invited the five current La Cambre Mode[s] students featured on the previous pages to submit questions to their school’s alumni designers.**

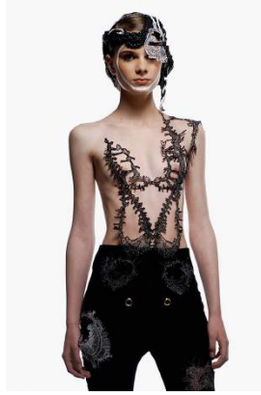


Matthieu Blazy fitting one of his student collections at La Cambre.

Julien Dossena as a student at La Cambre.

A look from Nicolas Di Felice’s second-year BA collection, 2006.

Looks from Marine Serre’s MA graduation collection, *RADICAL CALL FOR LOVE*, 2016.



A look from Anthony Vaccarello’s fifth-year MA collection, 2006.

Di Felice and Vaccarello. Photographs: Emmanuel Laurent. Model: Helen Feskens. / Serre. Photograph: Michael Marson.

Julien Dossena
creative director,
Paco Rabanne

What is your best memory of being a student at La Cambre?
There are so many, but most are based on the friendships we built at that particular time. Emulation and solidarity in work are two of the strongest values that I experienced at La Cambre. Even today, some of my closest friends are former classmates.

How did you experience the transition from student to successful designer at a big company such as Paco Rabanne? How do you balance your creativity and the industrial-production processes?
I remember when I was a student, all my willpower was focused on this one goal of working in an ultra-inspiring studio. It was really stressful anticipating this move, but in the end all you really have to manage is the change of scale. There’s more responsibility, of course, but in the day-to-day creative process, it is the same gestures and exploratory techniques. The industrial process can sometimes be destabilising, but you learn with experience – until it’s integrated into your relationship with creativity – that this balance is always present in the creative gesture.

Does the foundation of creative DNA that you forged at school still exist in your work?
You learn to express it for the first time at La Cambre and you’re invited to draw on it, but really it’s just a catalyst for what you’ve been carrying as aesthetic sensations almost since childhood.

How does it feel using your creativity in the service of a house? Have you found the right space in which to express yourself? Or do you prefer being independent with your own label?
Having experienced both, it’s a very different exercise: one is about creating a total universe that you make exist both visually and in the market; the other is at the service of a house’s aesthetics and the research into a pre-existing universe that must be perpetuated and respected. Whichever choice you make, both possibilities will ultimately call for the same commitment and the same problem solving whether it’s your name or the house’s on the label; it’s about knowing how to make your proposals resonate in a modern way.

La Cambre Mode[s], because of its position as part of an art school, defends meaningful fashion with aesthetic values that question the contemporary world. Does this philosophy remain at the heart of your concerns despite commercial pressures?
Of course, and even more so, when taking these commercial pressures into account. This is really the exact space where the philosophy of La Cambre will be crystallized, and above all where it will be brought to life in the street. The value that I remember most being taught at La Cambre is the principle of sincerity, of integrity in terms of self-expression. The teachers always pushed us to work on what really moved us personally, an idea of auteur fashion, if you can compare it to cinema, for example. I still keep this in mind when I work on a collection today.

The school is also well-known for the huge amount of work you have to do as a student. What advice would you give someone at the school today?
It’s great preparation for the endurance and hard work that this job requires. The amount of work may seem difficult at the beginning but it quickly becomes a necessary discipline. This is one of the great strengths of La Cambre students, which quickly manifests itself in the studios and ateliers. So, to the students: hang on in there and you will be prepared for all eventualities.

After all these years, do you still consider yourself as part of La Cambre?
Of course, in my domain, La Cambre is still perceived as a guarantee of quality and high standards. It remains the place where the teachers accompanied me and taught me to forge the aesthetic that is still mine today.

Matthieu Blazy
creative director,
Bottega Veneta

What is your best memory of being a student at La Cambre?
My first few months as a student are some of my best memories at La Cambre. I was 18 and had just arrived in Brussels. The mornings at the Marolles neighbourhood flea market, the cheap beer, my gang of friends, the parties – and most of all, that feeling of total freedom.

How did you experience the transition from student to successful designer at the head of a big company? How do you balance your creativity and the industrial-production processes?
You have to know how to value time; I’ve evolved step by step. During my studies, I did an internship at Balenciaga, then at John Galliano, but it was really with my first job at Raf Simons that I learned how to combine creativity with the production process.

Does the foundation of creative DNA that you forged at school still exist in your work?
Yes, the foundations are still there. At La Cambre, you’re encouraged to be curious about everything, without barriers or hierarchies, to understand creation in all its forms. Whether it’s through the study of fashion, design, art or architecture. I made a coat inspired by Laika, the first dog in space, which not everyone understood, but they let me do it. I still take the same approach in my creative process.

How does it feel using your creativity in the service of a house? Have you found the right space to express yourself?
You have to be intellectually and creatively honest, take risks, but also enjoy yourself. I'm lucky at Bottega Veneta to be surrounded by great teams that give me a lot of support.

La Cambre Mode[s], because of its position as part of an art school, defends meaningful fashion with aesthetic values that question the contemporary world. Does this philosophy remain at the heart of your concerns despite commercial pressures?
Yes, absolutely. We don't just make clothes for the runway; each collection is meaningful by questioning and being inspired by the world around us.

The school is also well-known for the huge amount of work you have to do as a student. What advice would you give someone at the school today?
Work is healthy! But so are friends...

After all these years, do you still consider yourself as part of La Cambre?
Yes, the training at La Cambre goes beyond the fashion world, which gives a certain freedom and allows a more experimental, occasionally more absurd, approach to clothing and design.

Marine Serre
founder and creative director,
Marine Serre

What is your best memory of being a student at La Cambre?
I'd say that my best memory was the *RADICAL CALL FOR LOVE* show, which was my last at La Cambre. It was an emotional moment for me and the culmination of a search for meaning that had taken five years.

How did you experience the transition from student to successful designer at the head of your own label? How do you balance your creativity and the industrial-production processes?
The transition was immediate and radical, given that I launched my house just a few months after the La Cambre show. It was a moment of great joy because it was the first time my work had been seen outside the school. As far as the industrial aspect of production is concerned, our Regenerate process, which involves upcycling, deadstock, innovative recycled materials, is the foundation of the house. It was very complicated to set up, given its innovative nature in the industry, but it's the reason we've been able to use a radical industrialization approach for six years now. With the DNA of the house centred around upcycling, I can stay true to my values. I've used my creativity to transform the production process.

Does the foundation of creative DNA that you forged at school still exist in your work?
Yes, as I said, the Regenerate process is the guarantee of this. My *RADICAL CALL FOR LOVE* collection was the beginning, through its sociopolitical questioning and through the design and production process. It was a kind of manifesto for all the collections that followed.

Does having your own label give you the right space in which to express yourself?
It was important for me to remain independent to stay free. It was also important because it's the only way to make sure that my values are respected and that commercial interests don't take over. Deciding to be independent takes a lot of work, perseverance, and perhaps a sort of optimism, too. Today, after six years, I feel like I've brought together a real community, not only within the company because now we're nearly 100, but also through the artists, activists, and creative people with whom we work, as well as all those who feel connected to our company.

La Cambre Mode[s], because of its position as part of an art school, defends meaningful fashion with aesthetic values that question the contemporary world. Does this philosophy remain at the heart of your concerns, despite commercial pressures?
Yes, completely. For me, it's vital to question the world we live in and to give meaning to an industry that's disconnected from the environment. I think that's why La Cambre suited me so well; it gave me an education that went beyond fashion design and taught me how to question the world.

The school is also well-known for the huge amount of work you have to do as a student. What advice would you give someone at the school today?
It's true – there was a lot of work at La Cambre, but it's the ideal place to learn rigour and believe me my days are fuller now. Beyond the workload, it's a place so full of passion, fun and freedom, and it really allows for personal and creative research.

After all these years, do you still consider yourself as part of La Cambre?
Yes, especially because I'm still really in touch with both the people I studied with and the teachers. I also loved my experience in Brussels; it's a city I have a really special bond with.

Anthony Vaccarello
artistic director,
Saint Laurent

What is your favourite memory as a student at La Cambre?
When I passed the entrance exam! I'd been doing fine arts and had been so busy having fun that I'd failed the year. I hadn't told my parents, though, so when I took the entrance exam for La Cambre I was like, 'Shit, if I fail this entry exam, I really am screwed because then I'll have to tell them I failed the fine-arts year.' I really focused on the exam and was so, so happy when I got in. Out of about 100 people taking the exam, only 20 of us were selected.

How did you experience the transition from student to successful designer at the head of a big company?
It didn't happen straight away. When I finished La Cambre in 2006, I went to Fendi, working with Karl, for two years. My own brand took ten years to establish. I quickly realized that coming from La Cambre you're not at all prepared for the whole production and merchandising side of fashion – the commercial system – about which we had absolutely zero lessons at that time. There was *none* of that at La Cambre, which I personally think is quite good, because we were encouraged to focus on far more artistic things from deep inside of us, which we ourselves were left to articulate. You end up discovering the commercial side of fashion while on the job, which makes more sense. One of the problems with French fashion schools is this overly product- and business-based approach, which results in everyone doing the same thing and becoming very commercial.

Does the foundation of creative DNA that you forged at La Cambre still exist in your work?
I think so. Back then it was the 'Bernhard Willhelm era' – everything a bit *mad*. That was the complete opposite of what I was doing at the time, which was way more Tom Ford. So I was seen as the Italo-sexy-Belgian – a bit of an anomaly, given where and when this was – but I didn't care. That's something that I have very much kept today.

How does it feel using your creativity to serve another house? Have you found the right space to express yourself within this house?
Working for Saint Laurent, I don't ever say to myself, 'I'm giving my creativity to someone else'. It is me through the DNA of Saint Laurent, an encounter between us that makes me do what I do. There isn't any frustration – this isn't my brand. I have sort of carte blanche anyway here, so I am very satisfied.

La Cambre Mode[s], because of its position as part of an art school, defends meaningful fashion with aesthetic values that question the contemporary world. Does this philosophy remain at the heart of your concerns?
I had the choice between La Cambre or going to Antwerp, which I had always thought was more about costume and theatre, less real. So I chose La Cambre for its more contemporary, clothing-based, wearable approach to fashion. That aspect of doing things that we can actually wear and that make sense today has always interested me. That's why I love this job [at Saint Laurent] – every six months we question what we're wearing today, so we don't go off-track. Does it make sense in terms of what we said six months ago, and what is happening around us, culturally?

The school is also well-known for the huge amount of work you have to do as a student. What advice would you give someone at the school today?
Things have changed slightly. I was on the jury this year, and the professors said that these days, young people want more of a life beyond fashion – they want a lover; they want a dog. It's so alien to me, because my generation – along with Matthieu [Blazy], Nicolas [Di Felice] and all of us – was so *entirely* focused on what we were doing at school. I didn't have any sort of life outside of it. I put everything else on hold for five years because I really wanted it. I *adored* it; I had so much fun. I loved the submissions when we were torn apart by the teachers. They were so mean, but I loved it! That's what enabled us to make progress; I never took the criticism badly. When you go to La Cambre or want to do this kind of job, it's like a religion; it's all or nothing. The other thing I noticed is that back in my day there were several very strong and different characters among the students, which meant that *very* different collections were created. You knew just from looking who had designed those different collections. It was apparent; it was so individualist.

After all these years, do you still consider yourself as part of La Cambre?
Yes, because those five years of training at La Cambre were so hard, they created a kind of affiliation. We feel like we are part of a group. Even if we don't see each other every day, I still speak to Matthieu and Nicolas. La Cambre really brought us together; you can see it in the way we work. We really acknowledge each other's work, and are united by that.

Nicolas Di Felice
artistic director,
Courrèges

What is your best memory of being a student at La Cambre?
I have a lot of good memories of meeting people, of the excitement before a jury, of the pleasure of learning a technique that really speaks to you and then opens doors for you. It's hard to choose one but I would say the preparation for the third-year fashion show, where for the first time we had to really think about the show as a whole, from where the models walked to the music – for me, a Eurodance piece played in slow motion – which made it quite serious and extravagant.

Does the foundation of creative DNA that you forged at school still exist in your work?
Yes, and I think that's quite reassuring. Of course, we're all constantly evolving, learning every day and being influenced by what we see, hear and experience, but La Cambre pushes you really to find

yourself as an individual, to find out what really moves and animates you. I think that's marked indelibly somewhere.

How does it feel using your creativity in the service of a house? Have you found the right space to express yourself?
It depends on your personality. For me, I was in a hurry to work for a house as a designer and less concerned with my own work. Towards the end of my studies, I really wanted to be in a team, to be out there, in the field. I like putting my creativity at the service of someone. Bringing new data into the equation, and having the mission to shape things in a new professional environment were like daily challenges. During those years, I didn't really want to speak publicly. Then came the Courrèges project where for the first time I felt I was in the right place at the right time. Even though the house is impressive because of its heritage and patrimony, it's also a house created by a man who was passionate, simple, ahead of his time, who wanted to dress people in the street and who saw his fashion as a total and radical universe. This is what motivated me to make my proposal as honest as possible.

La Cambre Mode[s], because of its position as part of an art school, defends meaningful fashion with aesthetic values that question the contemporary world. Does this philosophy remain at the heart of your concerns despite commercial pressures?
Of course. It can be through what we make – clothes and accessories – but also the way we make them – team management and production – and of course, how we show them – the communication and image. I always need to start with a story that makes sense to me, a subject, a situation or a state that really touches me and that will generate the inputs for the collection as a whole, from the collection itself to the music to the show. The collection as a whole, and therefore the more commercial pieces as well, will be generated in this same direction.

The school is also well-known for the huge amount of work you have to do as a student. What advice would you give someone at the school today?
Start by trying to find what truly drives you. Go beyond the same images continuously shown on social media. Then try to shape it as quickly as possible into a general idea of the collection. You can build it up more precisely later, with the happy surprises and incidents that happen along the way. Find other creatives you might collaborate with somehow. Rest or change your mind when you're going round in circles, take a break when things get stuck, and find good people to listen to your doubts and quandaries.

After all these years, do you still consider yourself as part of La Cambre?
Without a doubt. I would even say that I identify as a Belgian designer at the service of a house.

Olivier Theyskens
founder and creative director,
Olivier Theyskens

What is your best memory of being a student at La Cambre?
More than anything, I remember La Cambre as the place where, for the first time in my life, I met other people my age who were into art, who liked clothes, who were gay. I also have very good memories of the art courses – especially drawing – where fashion students got together with those from all the other departments. It all made me excited about school, about working, for the first time.

You went from student to successful designer with your own label incredibly fast. How was that experience for you?
It's funny because I was convinced it would take 15 years to even be able to show in Paris, and it ended up happening in less than one. I owe a lot of that to the fact that I had connections with a number of Parisian PRs. That's how my work got noticed that fast. At the same time, I was still living in Brussels, working with only a couple of friends, mostly thinking about the work, and conscious that success could vanish at any time. So it was a bit of an awkward transition, I guess.

Does the foundation of creative DNA that you forged at school still exist in your work?
Well, not really, but I must admit that I dropped out of the school in the middle of my third year, in 1997. Just like that, on a whim. I was in the middle of my end-of-year collection, and that collection ended up being the first one I presented to the public. Things have evolved since but, funnily enough, I feel like my working method has gone back to resembling the one I had back then, after years of working differently, for myself and other brands.

Speaking of brands, how do you express your own creativity when you're working for others? Is it easier or harder than to do it for your own label?
I've always liked working for other designers. As a student and a big fan of Helmut Lang and Karl Lagerfeld, I would avoid being too influenced by them in my work by taking a couple of evenings to design fake collections for them, to get those ideas out of the way. I loved, and still love, following the creative logic of another designer. When working for myself, sometimes things flow easily, and sometimes perfectionism gets the best of me and I get incredibly anxious. I definitely put extra pressure on myself.

The school is also well-known for the huge amount of work you have to do as a student. What advice would you give someone at the school today?
Honestly, I don't remember working all that hard back then; I even had a part-time job! I think I was lucky because I never had to start my projects over, but I do understand feeling overwhelmed if you're asked to repeat your work over and over again. That kind of thing can do damage, and I don't believe it's necessarily positive to put students in extreme situations. That being said, I think training students to work consistently – while taking pleasure in that work – is good. Interns from La Cambre stand out for their resourcefulness, their focus and their reliability, so Tony is definitely doing something right.

After all these years since you graduated, do you still consider yourself as part of La Cambre?
For a while I didn't, and I think that had to do with the way I left and how new the school was back then. It was immaturity on my part, really. Now, having reconnected with it, visited and been part of the end-of-year show jury, I see things differently. It's definitely where my roots as a designer are.

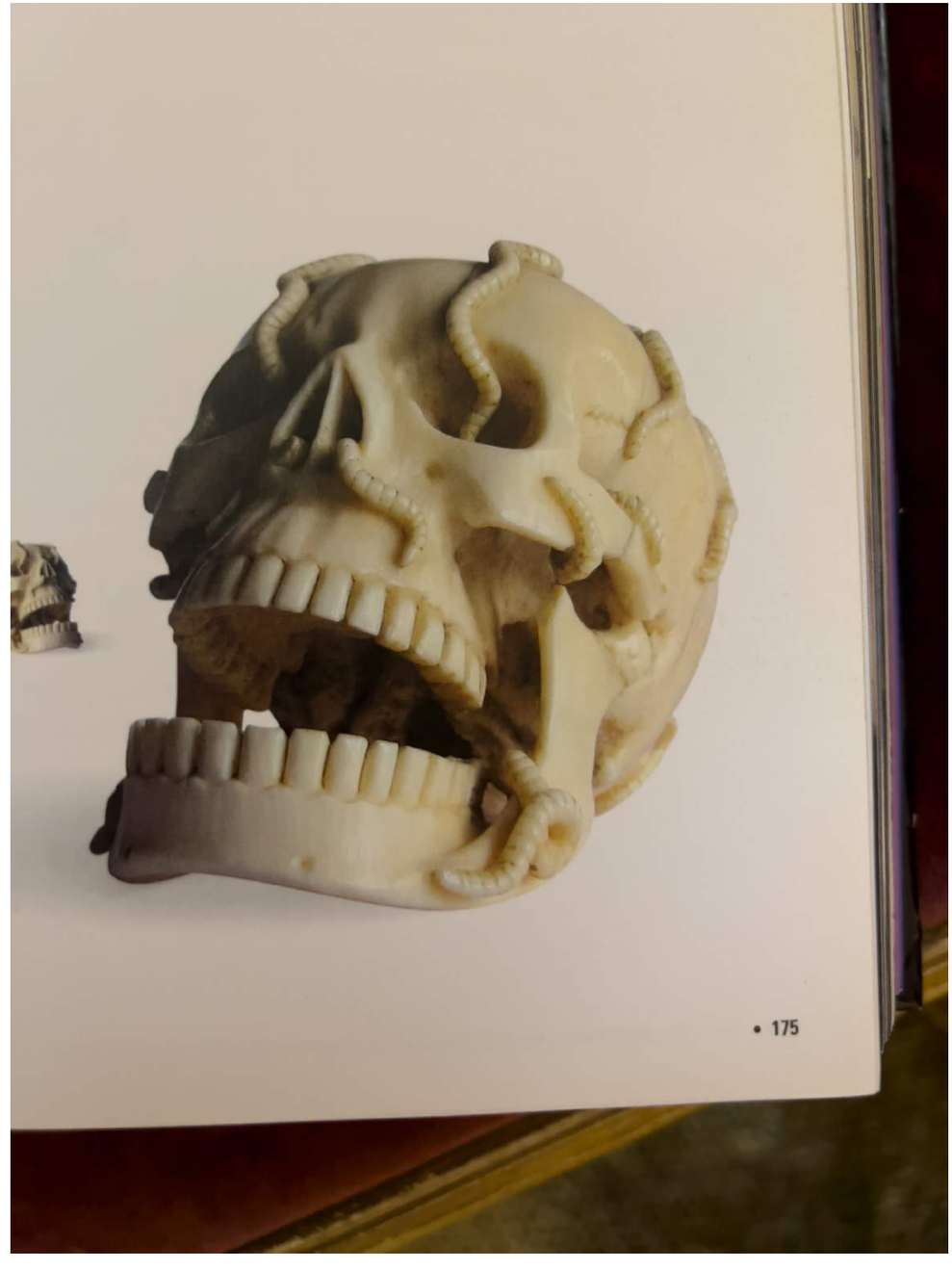
‘Vedo che lei ha capito.’

Privateness is possibly the most Venetian quality that the very Venetian jeweller Attilio Codognato possesses.

Text by Angelo Flaccavento
Photographs and layout by Juergen Teller; creative partner Dovile Drizyte

Salvador Dali
AUJOURD'HUI
DE CHIRICO

MARTIN KEMP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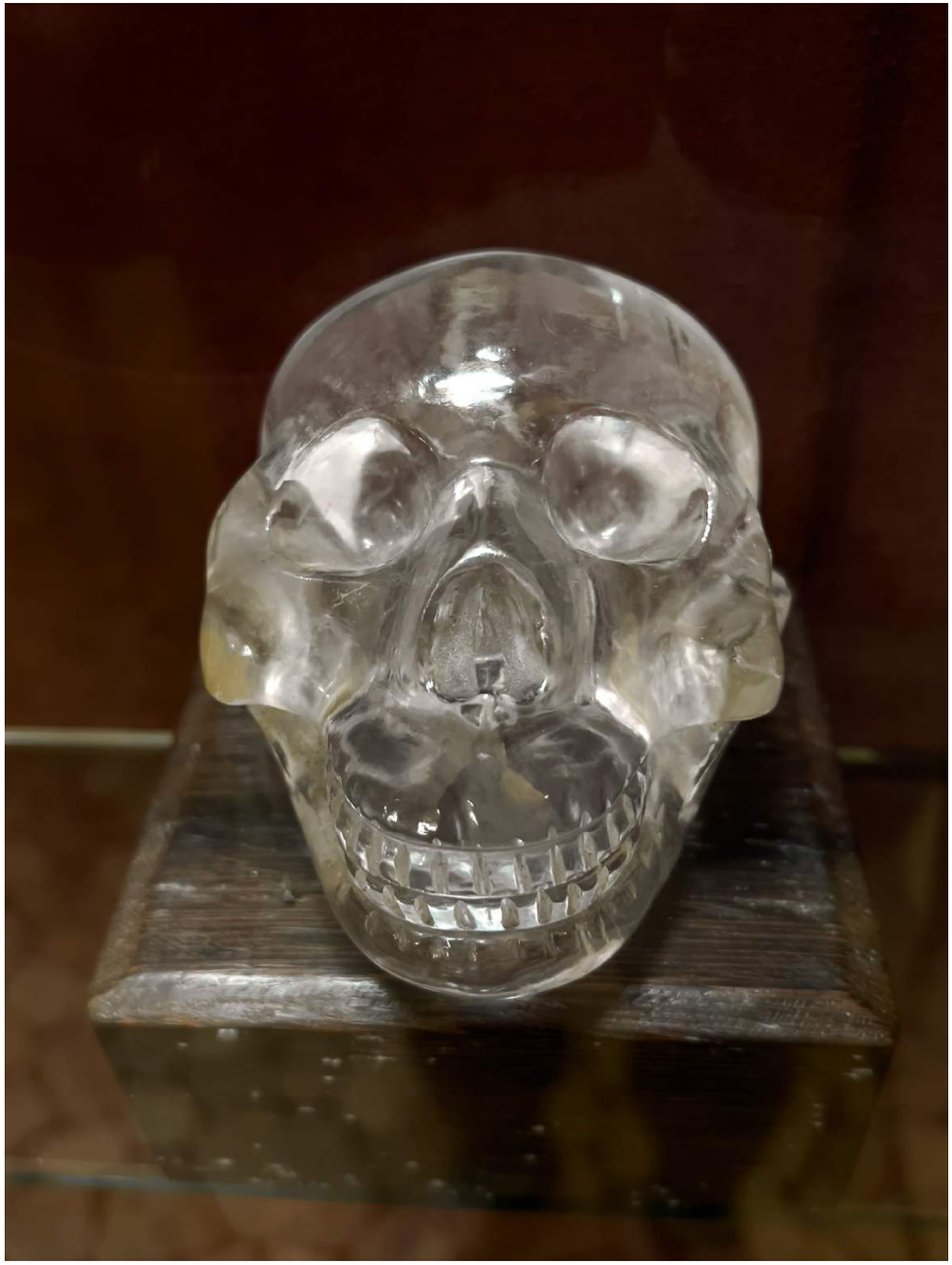

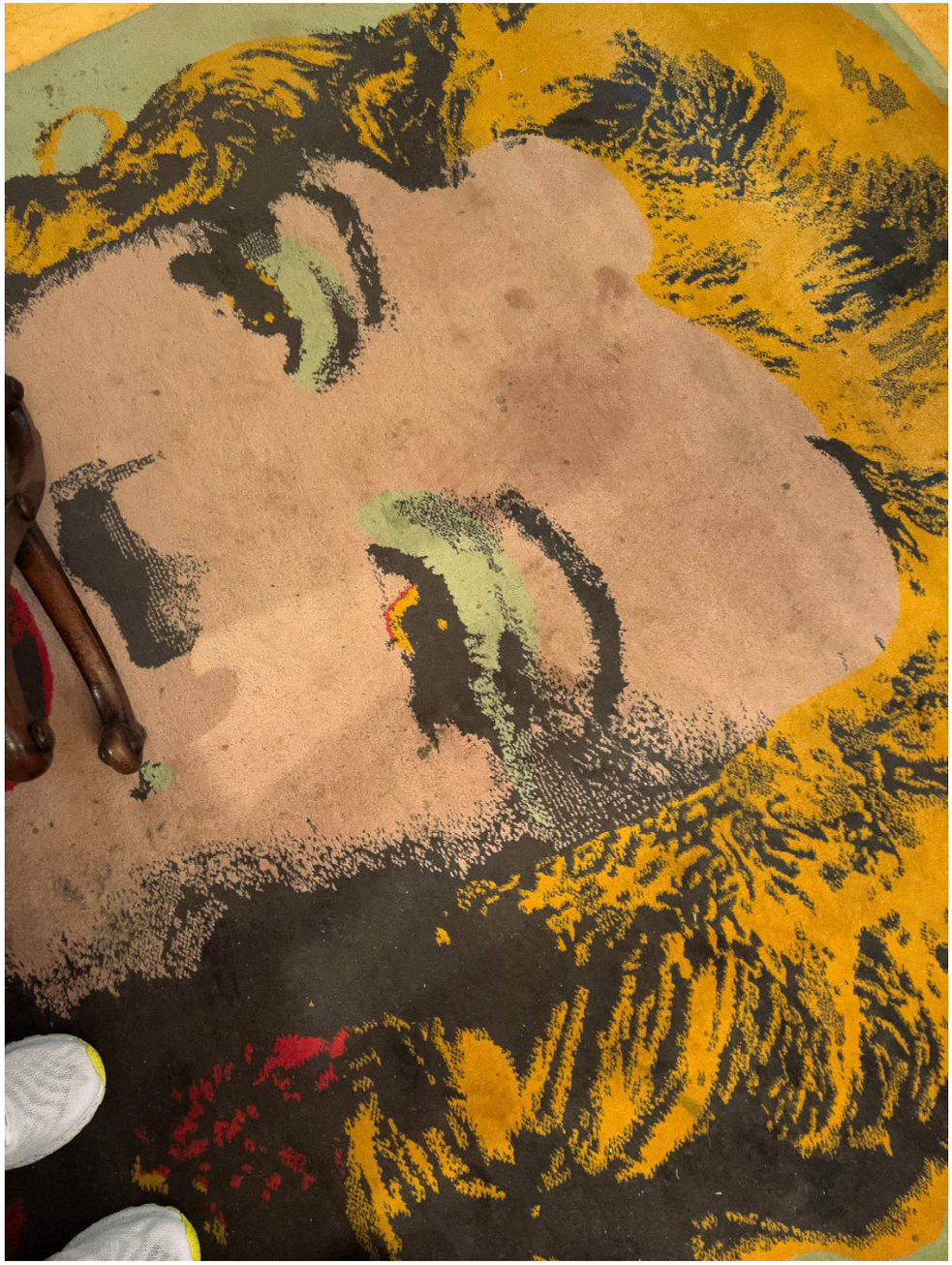

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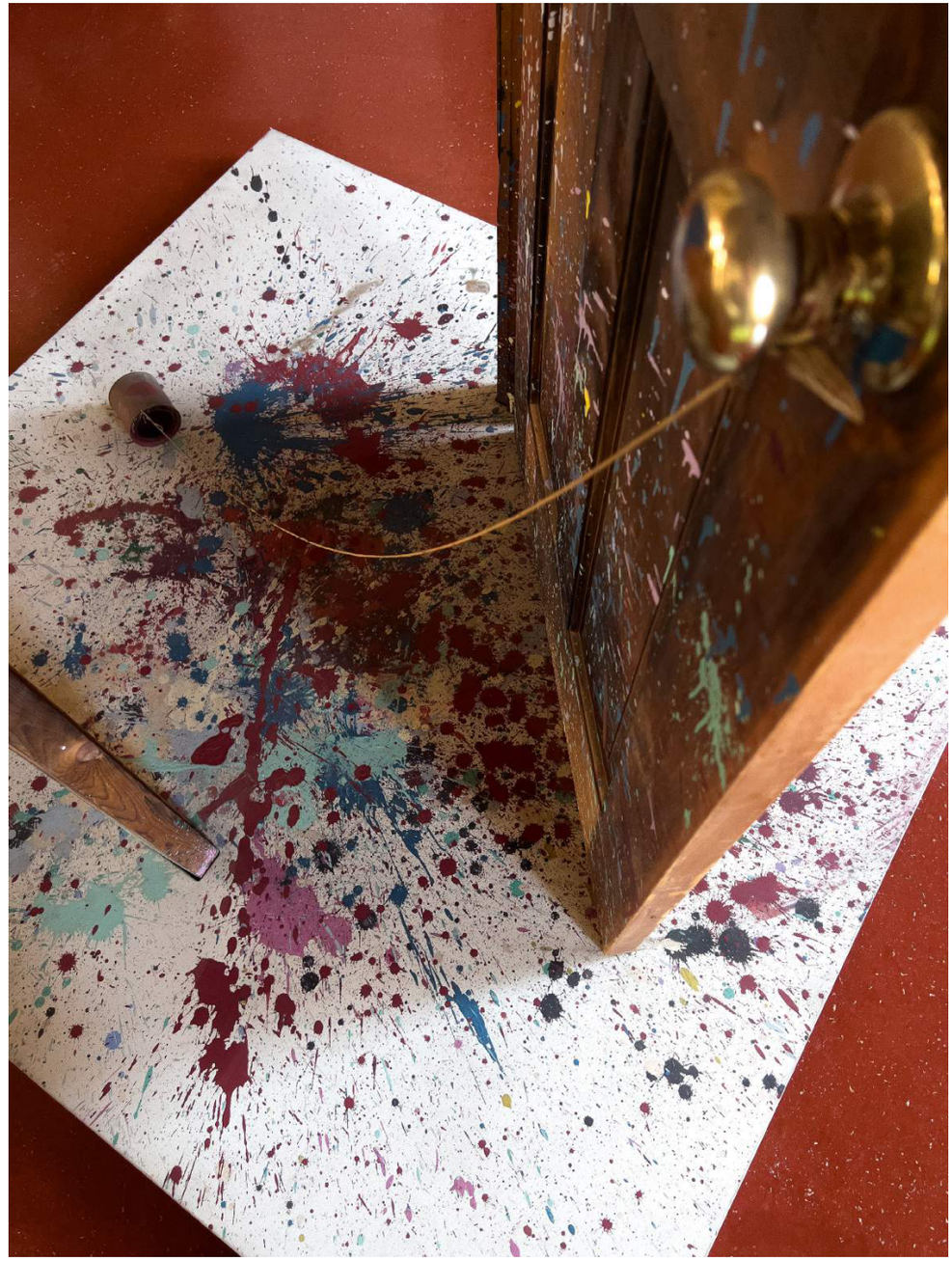


Years ago, Attilio Codognato was asked to open an exact replica of his Venetian store, Codognato, in New York. The Italian jewellery maker's business was growing fast in the US, but Attilio declined: he felt neither the urge nor the will to take that direction. He was, and still is, a lover of emotions, and his best work is the fruit of a dialogue with his clients – both he and his customer have to be in the same room. It requires time to bond and connect.

Codognato has been a Venetian landmark since 1866, when Attilio's great-grandfather Simeone opened the shop in the San Marco area. For over 160 years, the business has served royal families and the happy few, always keeping a strict shroud of discretion over its client list. Today, the *gioielleria* is still up and running, and still has just one point of sale in the world. There is no other way than heading to La Serenissima to get Attilio's ghoulish, painterly creations – mostly skulls and snakes, but also *mori*, cameos and the occasional coffin as a pendant – or variations on the archaeological style the previous Attilio, grandfather to the current one, perfected at the end of the 19th century. Call it a sense of the *genius loci* or cultivating one's own niche regardless of passing trends, fads, and geography. No openings in remote areas to cater potential markets. No wild dreams of expansion. Beauty, for Attilio, requires effort, as does his creative process. Codognato can only be a small-sized business.

Attilio Codognato has built Codognato's contemporary success. He gave the already admirable family heritage an unexpected baroque spin that is as personal as it is faithful to the irreverent sense of history that has always been part of the house's spirit. In doing so, he has never actively looked for fame or clients. They came – and still come – to him, including the Duke and Duchess of Windsor, Luchino Visconti, Maria Callas and Andy Warhol, who mentioned Codognato in his diaries. This privateness is possibly the most Venetian quality that this very Venetian man possesses.

Venice is a magnet. Suspended over glistening waters, always on the verge of sinking, it is still, fragile and powerful, a magical place where people go, attracted by its unique character and the cultural connections it creates. Venice is a door between the West and the East. As a city of merchants, it has carved its own identity out of the endless pillage of this and that, from here, there and everywhere. Its style is opulent and eclectic, and all the better for that. Venice is dark, mysterious, sultry, stinky, even. Minus the smell, it is also what lies at the heart of Codognato. Attilio's willingness to stay where he is and to keep honouring Venice has never been nostalgic. He is not obsessed with the past or averse to change. Not at all. In fact, the *gioielleria* is changing address for the first time in its long history, from number 1295 Salizada S. Moise in San Marco to number 1316, just around the corner. It is still the same area, where all the luxury brands now flaunt their flagships, and which is now another five-star luxe open-air mall with the usual suspects and boutiques, like every big city around the world. The only difference is the magnificent Venetian backdrop. Codognato will possibly be the only shop in the neighbourhood with a local flavour, like the nearby Harry's Bar or Caffè Florian. The plan is to make the new shop a replica of the old one.

'One stays the same by changing,' says Attilio, welcoming me into his home, a palazzo on the Grand Canal between Ca' Pesaro and the San Stae church. Attilio, who is now 85 but still enjoys going to his shop every day, is taking a few months off. It's October, the old shop closed in September and the new one should open in early December, right before the holiday season, when business flourishes. Attilio may be a gentleman, but he remains a merchant. His frame is small, making for a gently imposing presence, piercing eyes with a sense of the quixotic, a Roman nose made even more classical looking by his white beard, and backcombed white hair. He greets me wearing an immaculately pressed white shirt and black tailored trousers. Memory might trick me, but apart from a wristwatch, he wears no jewellery, certainly not the skulls that are his most sought-after artistic creations. Attilio is warm and welcoming, like the grandfather he is – his grandchild Andrea is pictured on these pages – with an inquisitive, at times slightly startled spark to his manner. As he speaks, one can hear a faint Venetian accent that adds another subtle layer of charm.

Attilio is definitely not one to scream for attention, neither personally nor professionally, yet he draws it, like the North Pole attracting a compass needle. It feels like he is a bundle of emotions, pressing against his proper, composed and gentlemanly persona, as if there is a whole trembling world behind the polite facade. One Attilio does not share with everyone.

'For over 160 years, the business has served royal families and the happy few, always keeping a strict shroud of discretion over its client list.'

There is something secretive and private even to the way he utters his thoughts, talking in short, broken sentences, not fussing over details, leaving his interlocuters ample room for rumination. Attilio is like his jewels: you either like them or do not, understand them or not, and he is not going to make any effort to win you over. 'Vedo che lei ha capito' – I see you get it – he replies each time I try to enquire a little bit more. With a smile he tells me my questions are *terrible*, meaning that they are too inquisitive, and even intrusive. So I desist, defeated by Attilio's unwillingness to go into details. This is not to say that our encounter is shallow; the way he looks at things, the objects that surround him, and most of all his starry-eyed silences are just as descriptive as words. Probably even more so.

Detailed explanation, in any case, is overrated; it certainly is for Attilio. He reminds me of Venetian painting in a way. Traditionally, the *scuola veneta* was about shapes created with colour, whereas the *scuola fiorentina* – the Florentine school – was all about the precision of drawing as a base for everything that came on top of that. Venetian painters were the Impressionists of their time, so to speak. Attilio, too, is about hazy definition, and he invites you to get close in *penombra*, in the half-light of the palazzo with its typically Venetian varnish of decay and collection of wonderful contemporary art, scattered around without a hint of preciousness. As I enter the main room, I am greeted by a magnificent Robert Morris sliced piece of felt, which is mirrored by another one on the opposite wall. The room is typical of historic houses in Venice; it is like a ballroom of sorts that gives onto all the rooms of the house. Other artworks on display include pieces by Gilbert and George, Jannis Kounellis, Joseph Kosuth, Marcel Duchamp, Robert Rauschenberg's cardboard boxes and rope, and a door by James Rosenquist. Throughout the house, contemporary art is mixed with antique pieces and Empire-style furnishing.

Art is Attilio's big passion besides jewellery. 'These pieces are like my babies – *i miei bambini*,' he says as we wander around the room. He considers art an emotional, not a financial investment. 'This collection was born at the same time of the jewels,' he says, 'and in some ways it is identical to them.' The further you delve into Attilio's world, the more you perceive it as suffused with and tightly wrapped in a halo of (dark) romance. What becomes most striking about the man, his life and habits, and his exceptional oeuvre is that it all comes together as a whole. The many facets of Attilio – the man, the jeweller, the refined art collector – are all expressions of him, through different means. And what lies beneath this organic expression of self is essentially his singular taste, nurtured by a cosmopolitan life and upbringing with firm Venetian roots. It has led him to create his own creative universe, including art that often belongs to the dimly lit, obscure periphery of an artist's oeuvre. Taste, of course, is something intangible, the portrait and expression of a person told through objects, choices, and selections. Attilio is a man of taste.

Attilio Codognato's taste for darkness is a paradoxical version, more vital rather than gloomy, forceful rather than sombre. Attilio has forged his own iconography drawing inspiration from centuries of art and existential musings on the transient quality of human life, condensing them into something as decorative and glitzy, but also as permanent, as jewels. The skulls he is renowned for, in fact, have a painterly origin: the *memento mori* and *vanitas* paintings that reached a peak with the Caravaggian school in the early 17th century. These compositions were seemingly dull masses of fruit, flowers and tableware, but in fact, bore deep existential meanings and intricate allegories. Just like the brooches, rings, pendants and earrings that bear Attilio's skulls, eyes glistening with colourful stones. They are an ode to life, rather than a warning of death. They carry the certitude that life is short, and the end is inevitable, but in ways that suggest awareness, not pessimism. They are jewels, after all. They are meant to shine and be beautiful.

The iconography of skulls, and the historical connections it evokes, ultimately expresses Attilio's personal bond with history, both his family's and the history of art and Venice. 'I did not invent the skulls,' Attilio says, enigmatically. 'In a way they were already in my father's work.' Attilio learned the craft from his father and the artisans he worked with, while discovering a passion for art with a collector uncle, Enrico Hintermann. He calls Fabergé and Kenneth Snowman[1] *maestri*, and has a fondness for Marcel Duchamp. His knowledge of history is wide. What sets him apart, however, and what makes Codognato a business that cannot grow in numbers, but only in depth, is his willingness to connect with the client,

'The brooches, rings, pendants and earrings that bear Attilio's skulls – eyes glistening with colourful stones – are an ode to life, rather than a warning of death.'

to keep it real, making it all about the object, not about codes, numbers or communication.

'In the end, what I look for is the emotion of an encounter,' he says. 'I have no favourite shapes or stones, because my best work is the result of a dialogue with a person, nothing more than that.' By this time, we have moved to the dining room, where lunch is served. As I contemplate a splendid Cy Twombly on the wall – a bunch of hasty black scribbles around a thick lump of white – I am musing on the artist's ability to unlearn his craft and paint like a child. 'Or paint like a man leaving messages on the wall in the public restrooms,' says Attilio, with a glint in his eye and a grin, his sardonic sense of humour bursting out.

As the bearer of a family knowledge that has been passed on from one generation to the next, to use his words, 'by osmosis', he lives with the feeling of history endlessly repeating itself. 'It's like pages of the same book,' he says, 'they are all the same, and yet they are all different.' There is no designated heir apparent to the *gioielleria* for the moment. Attilio's children are not directly involved – Mario[2] is a famed curator, Cristina a psychoanalyst living in London – but Attilio is not worried. Fatalism is a quality all islanders possess, and Attilio is an island in the jewellery world on the island that is Venice. 'Codognato will be around for a long time,' he says, adamantly, and settles into a long, affirmative silence.

1. Kenneth Snowman (1919-2002) was a renowned expert on the work of Carl Fabergé and chairman of Wartski of Llandudno, a leading London-based jewellers. A friend of Ian Fleming, Snowman was one of the few people to appear as themselves in a James Bond work. Playing a central role in the 1963 short story, 'The Property of a Lady', he is described as a 'good-looking, very well-dressed man of about forty' and Wartski's as the 'greatest Fabergé experts and dealers in the world'.

2. Art historian Mario Codognato has been chief curator of MADRE, since the contemporary-art museum opened in Naples in 2005. He was chief curator at the 21er Haus of the Belvedere in Vienna, and since 2016, has been director of the Anish Kapoor Foundation, which is based in Palazzo Manfrin in Venice.

Post-production by Lucas Rios Palazesi at Quick Fix.

‘I am not a fashionable person.’

In a rare interview to mark his eponymous brand’s 30th anniversary, Junya Watanabe reflects on nostalgia, the avant-garde, and his own sense of enigma.

Text by Alexander Fury
Photographs by Johnny Dufort
Creative direction by Junya Watanabe

KOMINE
SAFETY & INNOVATION
PREMIUM

YY 555 OB

All clothes by
Junya Watanabe,
Spring/Summer 2023.

Over time, it has become painfully evident that Junya Watanabe does not like to be interviewed. That's not a snipe, merely a statement of fact. There is scant information available on his life or first-person explanations of his work, despite last year marking the 30th anniversary of his eponymous brand, and 2023 the same anniversary of his first fashion show in Paris. Interview requests tend to be politely rebuffed by the press office at Comme des Garçons, the company that owns his brand, and even when granted, Watanabe can be outright evasive in his answers. You'll ask a question and Watanabe will answer it differently to how you might expect, even diffidently, sometimes dissidently. Basically, exactly how he pleases.

Interviewing Watanabe in episodic emails, in the weeks leading up to and immediately after his Spring/Summer 2023 show, which took place on October 1 in Paris, gave our exchange an even stranger cadence. There is, of course, the definite quality inherent to written correspondence, a lack of interpretation or inference, but our back and forth was also subject to translation, of course. My questions became verbose in a vainglorious attempt to round out and encourage longer answers, which perhaps the medium inherently discourages.

Nevertheless, the ongoing correspondence allowed for the possibility of returning to ideas and themes that seem to excite interaction or, doggedly, to try and extract more precise answers from this relentlessly taciturn interviewee. Who doesn't like a challenge?

Fri, Sep 16, 2022, 11:30 AM BST UTC + 1
Alexander Fury <_____>のメール:
This year marks the 30th anniversary of your label. Does that milestone mean anything to you – does it hold a significance at all? Has it influenced the way you are creating this year?

Wed, Sep 21, 2022, 8:41 PM JST UTC +9
Junya Watanabe <_____> wrote:
It does not mean anything specific to me.

Wed, Sep 28, 2022, 6:07 PM CET UTC + 2
Alexander Fury <_____>のメール:
What are your views on populism versus elitism? Not just in fashion, but in culture as a whole?

Tue, Oct 11, 2022, 8:05 PM JST UTC +9
Junya Watanabe <_____> wrote:
I think that this topic should be considered either by media or academic people. I do not want to speak about such a topic in public.

Wed, Sep 28, 2022, 6:07 PM CET UTC + 2
Alexander Fury <_____>のメール:
What is your feeling about becoming a 'star' to many young people – and some older ones, too? You are one of fashion's rock stars. Your name is even the title of a rap song. How do you feel about celebrity, about the fact your name and, perhaps, face, are known? Do you feel a degree of celebrity at all? I am always interested in how this affects designers, as so many are shy and reticent figures who wish to focus on their work rather than on the cult of personality that has been built around them. I find it interesting to ask you this, honestly, because it does not seem as if it is something you would be naturally drawn to or embrace. Is there a tension between achieving your goals – between success, expressing your ideas to the world – and the somewhat unwanted consequences? Does it affect your daily life?

Tue, Oct 11, 2022, 8:05 PM JST UTC +9
Junya Watanabe <_____> wrote:
I am not a celebrity. Since I keep my relationships with people to the minimum, there is no influence on my daily life.

To say that Watanabe fiercely guards his privacy is a profound understatement. The vacuum of information around him is ample demonstration of that. It is not the theatrical absence of Martin Margiela, Garbo-esque in its inscrutability, which has by now created a cult of personality as powerful as any around omnipotent designers such as Karl Lagerfeld. The artist is present – you can say hello to Watanabe after a fashion show, although he will not have bowed at its finale – but he absents himself from anything further.

Watanabe's silence reminds me of times I've interviewed artists, many of whom are more willing to write down their thoughts than say them aloud and – like Watanabe – would simply prefer that their work speaks for itself. We often espouse the idea that fashion is and always has been a powerful mode of communication, and with its seductive imagery now harnessed to the egalitarianism of the internet, its messages have become particularly potent. Yet the fashion media too often strong-arms designers not only into speaking about the meaning behind what they create, but also *explaining* for fear that something might be lost in the translation from image to words. 'Sometimes, I would like a little more feedback,' Watanabe told American *Vogue*'s Sarah Mower in 2006. 'Criticism would be better than silence.' But how can people critique if they don't understand? There is also often a fear of misinterpretation of meaning, especially when clothes are abstract and removed from received notions and accepted stereotypes, when they no longer hew close to our preconceptions of how a broad, padded shoulder symbolizes power, a spreading skirt below a wasped waist femininity. Because Junya Watanabe refuses an easy explanation, we are forced to analyse.

I should emphasize that there seems no truculence to Watanabe's reluctance to speak – he seems genuinely nonplussed as to why people may be curious about his views, his inspirations, his working methodology. Possibly because he doesn't share that feeling of inquisitiveness. 'When I buy music,' Watanabe once told me. 'I don't care about where the musician came from or his background or what his intent was. I just listen to the music, and if I like it, I like it.'

Yet people, including myself, are curious – because Junya Watanabe, now aged 61, is one of the great fashion designers of our time. It was recognized early: 21 years ago, the Victoria and Albert Museum featured Junya Watanabe's work heavily in an exhibition fittingly titled *Radical Fashion* – because that's what Watanabe has always made. His radicalism takes on many forms, as his clothes do when they twist around the body in unforeseen and unforgettable shapes that remap the topography of known anatomy. He has also innovated through techniques, basing extraordinary collections around seemingly humdrum techniques like pleating or water-resistant fabrics, which he demonstrated for Spring/Summer 2000 by deluging models with a sudden interlude of inclement weather mid-catwalk, like a pipe had burst overhead, allowing a delighted audience to watch the drops bounce off his clothes.

Sometimes, Watanabe's clothes are even radical in their banality – in his work, there is often a compelling notion of examining the quotidian and rendering it alien, of radically morphing the acknowledged and understood. Watanabe has reworked wardrobe staples like trench-coats and denim, army fatigues or sailor stripes, down jackets and leather biker jackets. They never become unrecognizable, but they do become other.

Thu, Sep 1, 2:34 PM BST UTC + 1
Alexander Fury <_____>のメール:
I don't want to pry too much, but as this piece will be published after your show in October, I thought it would be good to speak, even abstractly, about your state of mind at the moment. What are you thinking about and considering that may be reflected in this forthcoming show?

Thu, Sep 8, 2022, 10:00 AM JST UTC +9
Junya Watanabe <_____> wrote:
I think about my approach to creating garments and my way of expressing the collection separately. While the garments are taking shape, it is still a process of trial and error about how to present the collection. Continuing the previous men's collection, I am interested in how to make familiar things look new and fresh; I am still reflecting on this.

Fri, Sep 16, 2022, 11:30 AM BST UTC + 1
Alexander Fury <_____>のメール:
In our last correspondence you declared an interest in making familiar things look new and fresh. So many designers are fixated with the idea of the 'new' – what is your response to that, does it interest you? What are your feelings on innovation? Is it something you actively seek?

Wed, Sep 21, 2022, 8:41 PM JST UTC +9
Junya Watanabe <_____> wrote:
I want to design something innovative, something that no one has ever seen before, something that will even change someone's life and mindset. There have been such designers in the past and I believe there will be some in the future as well, but I am not a creator like them. That is why I always strive to get closer to them. I feel that such creations do not come out easily but rather suddenly through a lot of trials and errors. However, for the current mood of my creation, I am interested in the idea

'I want to design something innovative, something that no one has ever seen before, something that will even change someone's life and mindset.'

'I was not interested in fashion in my adolescence; I was purely obsessed with music. My first step into fashion was discovering Issey Miyake's clothes.'

Models: Ash at Girl, Birgit at 16 Paris, Emily at First Model Management, Juliette at 16 Paris, Lera at Studio Paris, Mika at Metropolitan, Teo at Success, Timothé at M Management.
Hair: Eugene Souleiman. Make-up: Isamaya Ffrench. Post-production: IMGN.

of reconstructing authentic items such as the motorcycle jacket, tailored jacket and trench coat into something with a new value.

Thu, Sep 1, 2:34 PM BST UTC + 1
Alexander Fury <_____>のメール:
Has your approach to design shifted over the past three decades? Or do you create clothes for the same reason and with the same set of goals and ideals as when you began? Furthermore, what are those goals? What do you want your clothes to express, to evoke?

Thu, Sep 8, 2022, 10:00 AM JST UTC +9
Junya Watanabe <_____> wrote:
I think it would be fantastic if I could create something strong and bring innovation to the world, rather than just making garments. Unfortunately, I have not been able to manage such work yet. While I do not know how many times I will be able to present my collections in the future, I believe I have a chance of achieving this as long as I keep presenting them. My goal is to create something that I have never seen, to surprise people who are interested in fashion.

or manga. In the past, it was used to describe interests so intense it rendered people unable to function in society, but now it has mellowed and come to mean deep passion. There's a touch of *otaku* to Watanabe's work, in his relentless pulling apart of clothes, his investigation of their forms and reconfiguration of both their shapes and meanings. Indeed, so exhaustive have his obsessive examinations of clothing archetypes and construction methods proven that they have become inescapable points of reference for fashion as a whole. If a designer wants to create a biker jacket, they have to examine Watanabe's versions. The feeling isn't mutual. 'I don't really look at the other designers,' he says, 'I don't really know what they're doing. I don't intentionally try to do something different. Instead of trying to create something alternative, it's really an expression of what I really, really want to create. It may seem alternative to the audience, but for me, it's my own way, what I really want to show.'

In doing so, Watanabe has somehow managed to transform garments previously considered static – MA-1 bomber jackets, those motorcycle leathers, pleated skirts, white shirts, T-shirts – and in doing so, reinvented many fashion

'I feel the work of Rei Kawakubo and Issey Miyake has had tremendous impact on the world, not only in terms of clothing, but also social phenomena.'

Wed, Sep 28, 2022, 6:07 PM CET UTC + 2
Alexander Fury <_____>のメール:
Many would say that you have achieved your stated goal, that you have created something innovative, that no one had seen before. I understand though that, often, it is difficult for designers to be satisfied with their own work, with their own creations. You, like so many creative people, always strive for better. But I do wonder if you have been especially proud of any particular collections, if that's the correct word? Perhaps satisfied with? Are there shows from your own past that you feel approach that goal you set for yourself?

Tue, Oct 11, 2022, 8:05 PM JST UTC +9
Junya Watanabe <_____> wrote:
As I mentioned before, I do not have any feeling of accomplishment about my creations. Although I do not deny my past works, I am not proud of them either.

Otaku is an interesting Japanese word. Roughly and indirectly translated as 'geek' or 'nerd', it denotes an obsessive interest in something niche, often applied to fans of anime

wheels. It is an exceptional achievement. He is one of the rare designers whose clothes confound expectations, whose inspirations can sometimes confuse. Confusion can be good. It means something is new, which is what Watanabe is interested in. 'I feel that the word "new" is such a hard word to define and to grasp, and understand,' says Watanabe. 'I always try to work towards creating something new, achieving something new.'

That notion of the new is a persistent thread running throughout Watanabe's work, sometimes even woven into it. In 1995, he presented a series of clothes in a stain-proof fabric woven from polyester and steel devised by a manufacturer specialized in fibres used in radar equipment. In 1999, he worked with Japanese textile mill Toray – which invented Ultrasuede in the 1970s – to create a waterproof textile that traps air and pushes water to the surface, rather than repelling liquid with an impermeable coating. It was the fabric he used for that Spring/Summer 2000 collection. His style oscillates, constantly, between the innately accessible and opaquely esoteric. You genuinely never know what you will see each season at a Watanabe show.

Wed, Sep 28, 2022, 6:07 PM CET UTC + 2
Alexander Fury <_____>のメール:
Did you feel a connection to fashion, as a child or an adolescent? What originally drew you to the fashion world?

Tue, Oct 11, 2022, 8:05 PM JST UTC +9
Junya Watanabe <_____> wrote:
I was not interested in fashion in my adolescence; I was instead a boy who was purely obsessed with music. I became interested in fashion when I started thinking about my future occupation. I am not a fashionable person. My first step into the fashion world was when I became interested in Issey Miyake's clothes while searching for a job that would allow me to express my ideas in some way.

Thu, Oct 20, 2022, 5:50 PM AST, UTC +3
Alexander Fury <_____>のメール:
You mentioned your aim to innovate, to create something that no one has seen before, something that will even change someone's life and mindset. Which designers do you feel have achieved this, in the past? I am, perhaps, covertly asking you to tell me which designers you admire, and why you admire them. I am intrigued as to whose work you strive to approach with your own.

Wed, Oct 26, 2022, 7:10 PM JST UTC +9
Junya Watanabe <_____> wrote:
I feel that the works of our president, Rei Kawakubo, and Issey Miyake have had tremendous impacts on the world, not only in terms of clothing, but also in terms of social phenomena and artistic aspects.

Little information about Watanabe's upbringing is available. The designer himself is as reticent to talk about it – of course – as he is about so much else. He was born in 1961 in the city of Fukushima. You ask about influences in his childhood, about his parents, about how and if fashion registered, and Watanabe pushes back. 'Nobody had a creative profession in my family,' he says. Yet his mother had a shop offering made-to-order clothes. In case that sounds too grand, Watanabe clarifies that his mother was a seamstress rather than a designer, selling ready-to-wear that she tailored to fit

client's bodies. First hearing that, I couldn't help but think of the pinching and folding that so often characterizes her son's work, his approach so like a dressmaker fitting garments to a body. He doesn't speak about his father.

In 2016, I travelled to Tokyo to interview Watanabe in person, an exceptional experience. It was in August, the humidity an oppressive 70% or so. I landed as Typhoon Mindulle was coming ashore, buffeting the bamboo that lines sections of the highways leading from Narita Airport to central Tokyo. Taxis there are blocky, vintage models, archaic-looking Toyota Comforts or Nissan Crews; the drivers wear crisp white gloves, the interiors are outfitted with lacy covers to protect their seats like a stereotypical grandmother's house. All of this seemed quaintly at odds with the avant-garde fashion that has become so synonymous with the country.

The Comme des Garçons companies – including the original label and its menswear line Homme Plus, the Tao line helmed by Tao Kurihara, the label Noir Kei Ninomiya, established in 2012, and of course Watanabe's men's and women's labels – are responsible for much of that repute. They are based in a brick office building in Aoyama, and have been since 1982,

'I am not a celebrity, and since I keep relationships with other people to a bare minimum, that whole side of fashion has no influence on my daily life.'

the year Kawakubo first gained notoriety and pre-eminence by showing a collection of hole-pocked black clothes in Paris. Her designs, and those by her then romantic partner, Yohji Yamamoto, were dubbed, among other epithets, 'Hiroshima's Revenge' by a casually racist fashion press. It was an attitude based, in part, on a fear of clothes that literally and figuratively clawed at tradition and poked holes in received ideas of dress. Instead of being tailored, clothes were cut flat, seemingly baggy and shapeless but actually focusing on a different relationship between body and cloth. Kawakubo's early shops even eschewed mirrors in their fitting rooms: she wanted customers to focus on how clothes felt rather than how they looked.

The label's collections exerted a significant influence upon a young Watanabe. 'During my studies, Rei Kawakubo, Yohji Yamamoto, they were the big names,' Watanabe says. 'I studied them, and of course I was influenced by them as well. At the time, I was very influenced by Pierre Cardin, too.' At that point, Cardin was a fuddy-duddy fashion dictator best known for owning Maxim's and licensing his name to everything from floor tiles to sardines to orthopaedic mattresses. Yet there's something of Cardin's early innovation in Watanabe's

striking, uncompromising shapes, his obsession with geometric forms, his interest in innovative materials, that aforementioned ceaseless search for the new. It was something he found in the work of Issey Miyake, too, whose influence he describes as 'profound'. Like Cardin, Miyake played with fabric and form, pushing the limits of both.

Wed, Sep 28, 2022, 6:07 PM CET UTC + 2
Alexander Fury <_____>のメール:
Do you ever look back at your own work? Is there a sense of self-examination at all or are you always anxious to move to the new and the next, to push yourself towards the future?

Tue, Oct 11, 2022, 8:05 PM JST UTC +9
Junya Watanabe <_____> wrote:
I sometimes look back at my past works and use them as a reference during the creation process. I think it is impossible to come up with an idea from nothing.

Wed, Sep 28, 2022, 6:07 PM CET UTC + 2
Alexander Fury <_____>のメール:

looks like some anyplace office building, the architecture of its design studios similar to many others, too. Watanabe has never left this building, professionally speaking. He joined Comme des Garçons in 1984, straight after his graduation from Tokyo's Bunka Fashion School. He rapidly became head of Comme des Garçons' Tricot and menswear labels, before the company created a womenswear line especially for him, under his own name, in 1992.

Designing under the same roof, comparisons between Watanabe and Kawakubo are inevitable – and, spanning the entirety of his working life, Comme des Garçons has fundamentally shaped his design ethos. 'During my studies I would create clothes based on the textbook of how to make a dress, how to make a jacket, step by step,' he says. 'Those ideas were completely thrown out the window when I came to the company. You may already know, but when I entered the company, even the street styles and street fashion was completely different from what Rei Kawakubo was creating. That had a great impact on me as well.'

Kawakubo's early work and its layers and deliberately abstract loose silhouettes challenged conventional Western

'Although it is great to move forward innovatively and be avant-garde, the current situation has not made me feel like that in many ways.'

Given the general tone of these questions, I wanted to ask how you feel about nostalgia? It seems today to be all-pervasive, with referencing abounding among the work of many designers, as well as figures from other cultural spheres. Have you ever been seduced by nostalgia? And if not, why not? Conversely, is there anything you are nostalgic about – even if you wouldn't address it through your work, perhaps?

Tue, Oct 11, 2022, 8:05 PM JST UTC +9
Junya Watanabe <_____> wrote:
As it might be commonly said, I've turned 60 and I think that I feel nostalgic about the past more often. At the same time, I have also been feeling strongly that past experiences make the present. While I can distinguish nostalgia based on personal emotion from nostalgia I can feel in my work, it is true that nostalgia still exists at the deepest level of this collection's theme.

I had anticipated the Comme des Garçons building would be stark and severe or perhaps slightly chaotic and guerrilla in the vein of the Dover Street Market spaces. In reality, it just

dress – the kind of garments Watanabe's mother fitted to the physiques of her Japanese clients. Kawakubo's recent work has been described by the designer herself as 'objects for the body', constructing shapes in cloth that question the permutations and limitations of what we can describe as clothes. Yet, interestingly, Watanabe has in some respects gone in the other direction, with his explorations of staple garments, and embrace of traditions and investigating archetypes. Unlike Kawakubo, he has created collections with fit-and-flare silhouettes reminiscent of Dior's New Look and homages to Gabrielle Chanel's Waspy 1960s bouclé tweeds.

As part of my visit to Watanabe, and after much back and forth, I wrangled the opportunity for a walk-through of Watanabe's ateliers. He wasn't especially pleased about it, but eventually consented. When I passed through the door into the deserted room, I realized that every single garment, every mood board, every bolt of fabric had been completely covered, with an obstinacy so extraordinary I almost laughed aloud.

Watanabe will explain his clothes in few words – if you're lucky, there may be a whole sentence, but it's a rare occurrence.

Here are a bunch of his gnomic pronouncements. 'Geometric sculpture.' 'Heavy-duty couture.' 'Hyper-construction dress' (paradoxically, another was labelled 'Non-constructed'). 'Sexy by Junya Watanabe.' A few times he has simply stated there was no theme. It reminded me of something the milliner Stephen Jones once told me about working with Rei Kawakubo. As inspiration for the hats he was to make for her collections, she would him fax ideas, sentences, maybe a drawing if he was lucky. On more than one occasion, he said, she sent the simple statement, 'I don't know.' Kawakubo works the same way with her design staff – and Watanabe began as a pattern-cutter alongside her. To those cutters, she briefs in abstract, invites accidents and interpretation; Watanabe does the same with his staff. '"What intrigues you?" is the question I ask the pattern makers,' says Watanabe. 'What each individual thinks is interesting – something that's completely unrelated to the idea of clothing.'

Fri, Sep 16, 2022, 11:30 AM BST UTC + 1
Alexander Fury <_____>のメール:
Music seems a particular source of inspiration. You've created collections inspired by Debbie Harry, and last Autumn/Winter you titled your show *Immortal Rock Spirit*. What is it about music that inspires you? Is there something in its universal connection, its emotional resonance for so many people, that you find attractive?

Wed, Sep 21, 2022, 8:41 PM JST UTC +9
Junya Watanabe <_____> wrote:
Yes, you are right. Music that remains in my memory or which I was obsessed with listening to when I was young still fascinates me and I have featured it as a theme of runway shows several times. For me, music is more about personal taste and memories, than the fact that it has universal connection and resonates with many people.

Sun, Oct 16, 2022, 11:29 AM BST UTC + 1
Alexander Fury <_____>のメール:
Could we possibly talk a little about your design process? Is there a great deal of physical work with patterns and fabric, with manipulating cloth? Or do you work more conceptually? Do you have a large team to help?

Wed, Oct 19, 2022, 9:52 AM JST UTC +9
Junya Watanabe <_____> wrote:
For all of the garments, we try to reach the form by manipulating fabric. A lot of forms and details without concept end up creating a concept. Our team consists of more or less ten pattern-makers and ten working on the production. We produce the garments in approximately ten factories in Japan.

Sun, Oct 16, 2022, 11:29 AM BST UTC + 1
Alexander Fury <_____>のメール:
Your Spring/Summer 2023 collection framed your work within the New Romantic subculture – but it also felt like an exercise in pattern-cutting, with clothes almost embedded inside free-falling cloth. Did the inspiration for those pieces come from the New Romantics or from another idea? I wonder how it all links together for you in this specific collection?

Wed, Oct 19, 2022, 9:52 AM JST UTC +9
Junya Watanabe <_____> wrote:
The concept for the Spring/Summer 2023 collection was 'one piece of cloth' and 'reconstruction of uniforms'. As you real-

'For all of the garments, we try to reach the form by manipulating fabric. A lot of forms and details without concept end up creating a concept.'

ized, I started with the idea of whether we could make garments by embedding necessary structural parts such as shoulder padding and hair canvas, into an uncut piece of cloth to constitute garments. Reconstructing uniforms, as another concept of clothes-making, is one of the techniques I use every time. This time, we deconstructed and reconstructed racing wear by Komine, which is a Japanese motorbike-wear company. There is no specific reason why I chose racing wear; it was simply the uniform that I felt like reconstructing. In other words, the uniform inspired us to create garments; New Romantic is just a concept for the show stage. I came to it while I was thinking how I could present the garments that were born from the idea of exploring form and fabric in an exciting and an interesting way. Regarding this consideration of New Romantics, there was an extended sense that lasted from the pop culture of the men's collection in June. In terms of music history, the men's collection was American, but this women's collection is about London in the similar period. I also had a nostalgic feeling. Although it is great to move forward innovatively and be avant-garde, the current situation did not make me feel like that in many ways. If I take an

example of music, it might be like a classical musician playing with a contemporary mindset by considering the works of great composers in the past.

Watanabe no longer cuts his own patterns. 'While I no longer make patterns myself, the instructions I give to our cutters are based on my knowledge of pattern-making,' he says. Watanabe's past is traced in every seam, his knowledge in their placement and intention. They scar jackets with unexpected cuts, complex and intricate, or converge at a waist, suppression and expansion allowing fabric to flow. There is an early Watanabe collection, from 1996, in which the cut of the dresses seemed to carve them away from the body at the back, like aprons worn over trousers. Another collection, two years later, presented clothes sewn from folded panes of fabric, their volume achieved by the insertion of twisting loops of thin metal tubing inside narrow channels that buoyed the clothes out, sometimes helter-skeltering around the outside like abstract jewellery. There's a more universal past, too, a notion of memory and history built into many of Watanabe's pieces. A fan of seaming at the waist may recall the pinched-in waists of 18th-century gowns; those metal rings look like 19th-century crinoline hoops.

If Watanabe's collections perhaps remained in the abstract for the first decade or so, in more recent work, his love of music has been more assertively expressed. You might even hypothesize that when Watanabe creates collections themed around fashion, they seem like work; when they are themed around music, they feel like fun. The most mind-boggling collections he has executed have been obsessive explorations of crafts like pleating or garment typologies; the most enjoyable shows he has staged have seemed like odes to musicians he particularly admires. In March 1996, he showed an Autumn/Winter collection nearly entirely composed of black leather on models with close-cropped hair and tattoos painted down their arms, all set to the screeching guitar riff of Jimi Hendrix's version of 'The Star-Spangled Banner'. Other shows have dressed models as avatars of Blondie's Debbie Harry or in chopped-up band T-shirts patchworked into dresses and coats.

This Spring/Summer 2023 collection was obviously another example. It was held at the Palais de Chaillot, not in the grand chamber sentineled by a panorama of windows overlooking a picture-perfect view of the Eiffel Tower, but in a space used by most designers for their backstage. It was a typically Watanabe touch. The models strode around to live-mixed music, a mash-up of Duran Duran, Cabaret Voltaire and Japan (the band), hairstyles and make-up flashing back to the early 1980s. The audience bounced in their seats, enthused.

If Watanabe talks about the importance of the reconstruction of uniform – and his Spring/Summer 2023 collection alone took in a litany, from city suiting to motorcycle clothing to bourgeois uniforms of prim blouses with lariats of pearls – the garb of youth cults and musical fandom can be seen as another type of unofficial uniform, one equally embedded with meaning in the tiniest gestures. Watanabe's work has always toyed with those gestures and symbolism, using the implied meaning of certain fabrics, cuts and details to discover a new language of clothes.

Thu, Sep 1, 2:34 PM BST UTC + 1
Alexander Fury <_____>のメール:
The last two years of the Covid-19 pandemic have been exceptional times for us all to live through. Your first show in Paris for over two years was in June and felt like a light at the end of a tunnel. What has this period been like for you? Has it affected how you create, and what you create? Which lessons did you draw from the experience?

Thu, Sep 8, 2022, 10:00 AM JST UTC +9
Junya Watanabe <_____> wrote:
In terms of *monozukuri* – creation – nothing has changed because of the Covid-19 pandemic. My *monozukuri* is a repetitive process, of working in my head, and with my hands, in a room.

Thu, Oct 20, 2022, 5:50 PM AST, UTC +3
Alexander Fury <_____>のメール:
You've alluded to the current state of the world. How has that affected you creatively? Does the uncertainty of our current moment – war, the economy, the pandemic – make you feel, perhaps, more nostalgic? Is it about comfort during difficult times? Is now a difficult time to move forwards?

'I've turned 60 so I think I feel nostalgic about the past more often. At the same time, I've also been feeling that past experiences make the present.'

Wed, Oct 26, 2022, 7:10 PM JST UTC +9
Junya Watanabe <_____> wrote:
In my previous answer, I did not mean 'the current situation in the world', but rather my personal situation. As a person living in the society nowadays, no matter your standpoint, you are moving forward while being affected by something, aren't you?

The focus here has been womenswear, because while Watanabe has a successful and influential menswear business, which he has shown in Paris since 2002, he says he approaches creating for the two lines differently. 'For menswear, I take an approach to creating garments that I could have in my wardrobe,' he writes, in one of our exchanges. 'For womenswear, I am not creating for someone's wardrobe; rather I would say it is purely a laboratory of my creation.'

I wanted to return to something Watanabe said, about his fundamental wish in creating clothing: he wants to change people's lives. This, I suspect, is difficult through fashion, and always has been. Yet what Watanabe has, perhaps, been able to do is shift a mindset. He has altered the way the world – or, at least, some of it – looks at things. He has questioned conventions previously considered immutable, and turned them on their head. He has embraced fashion clichés, exploded them, even destroyed them. That's his legacy. That's what is truly new.

Junya Watanabe runway archives 1993-2022

After hiring Junya Watanabe as a pattern-cutter at Comme des Garçons in the mid-1980s, Rei Kawakubo invited the designer to establish a label under his own name in 1992. Having showed a first collection in Tokyo, he came to Europe in March 1993 to present his debut womenswear show at Paris Fashion Week. Over the ensuing 30 years, the designer has built a reputation for powerfully inventive collections that explore his cultural and sartorial obsessions – from punk to British tailoring to military wear – that he transforms into clothes that do the talking so he does not have to.

To celebrate three decades of Watanabe's Paris womenswear shows and the continuing power of his runway visions, *System* selected 10 key collections and asked an all-star cast to discuss them and the designer's inimitable work: Watanabe's Bunka Fashion College professor Dr Sanae Kosugi; Japanese fashion doyen Taque Hirakawa; early adopter and founder of *i-D* Terry Jones; long-time supporter and stylist Amanda Harlech; fashion critics Tim Blanks and Robin Givhan; archivist and superfan collector Rory Cole; regular collaborators hair stylist Tomihiro Kono and make-up artist Isamaya Ffrench; fellow designers Kim Jones and Simone Rocha; and, finally, Watanabe himself.

Interviews by Rahim Attarzadeh

Autumn/Winter 1993
'Origins and pattern-making'

Taque Hirakawa, fashion journalist: Junya Watanabe is one of the few truly artisanal pattern-cutting designers; he knows how to combine confidence, insecurity and reality with the intense labour of creating exactly what he wants to design.
Dr Sanae Kosugi, Watanabe's teacher at Bunka Fashion College: At Bunka, Junya would dedicate *every* moment he had to studying. I could immediately tell that he was someone whose mastery of technique meant he could express his design ideas in clothing. In fact, the designs and sketches that he did were so accomplished that they were always stolen and copied by other students in the class.
Terry Jones, founder, *i-D*: From the very start Junya had a very respectful approach to creating new silhouettes that I am sure he inherited from Rei Kawakubo. You didn't get a sense that he ever trod on her toes or tried to do what she did, though.
Taque Hirakawa: Junya subtly incorporated Japanese pop and street culture into the overall brand world of Comme des Garçons. He then skilfully blended that same culture into his own vision of the world and made use of the differences between the two. The basis of how he differed from Rei Kawakubo was that he learned what Rei could not do. Aware of his own difference he made artisanal clothes under Rei Kawakubo, while creating a reality that allowed for sufficient 'pattern-making'. The collection that I remember most and would like to see again is his debut collection for Autumn/Winter 1992, the one he presented in Tokyo before showing in Paris.
Tim Blanks, editor-at-large, The Business of Fashion: I don't know how many years he was a pattern cutter for Comme des Garçons before starting his own label, but it must have been an education in how to make the unworkable workable.
Terry Jones: We started attending Junya's shows in Paris from the very beginning, and it was immediately obvious from that very first season that Junya didn't conform to trends. Each time he showed, we looked forward to what we were going to see, because it was very clearly something he was creating for that exact moment.
Junya Watanabe: I cannot answer about how my thoughts have changed over the years, but what I can say is that my interest in making clothes has been consistently based on pattern-making. Each of my collections is based upon the pursuit of how to approach that skill in the most interesting way possible.

Autumn/Winter 2000
'Techno Couture'

Taque Hirakawa: I've always thought that it was probably in 2000 that Junya started to show the world his skills to the fullest.
Tim Blanks: I've read that he admired Pierre Cardin and Issey Miyake. If you strip out whatever the fabrics are and whatever is going on at a surface level, there is something not looked enough: Junya is a quintessential modernist. His attitude is all about combining things and hybridizing all these different elements and bringing together Japanese tradition and Western influences. I also read that he describes his work as *monzukuri*, which means manufacturing or making things. That is how Issey described his work, too. If he was ever asked what he did, he said that he 'made things'. That's what Junya does as well, he makes things.
Amanda Harlech, stylist and creative consultant: Junya dissects the templates of couture: Vionnet bias, Dior New Look, New Romantic, or Galliano's *Incroyables* – but with the razor blade of punk. Through this investigation of craft and couture, he has an understanding of the songlines of folklore within 21st-century culture – how everything changes and yet remains.

Autumn/Winter 2003
'Classic clothing interpreted in my own way'

Junya Watanabe: Although I have not mastered the art of tailoring, I have deepened my interest and my knowledge by deconstructing many authentic, well-tailored garments from flea markets and antique shops that I have visited in London.
Tim Blanks: What makes Junya's work so idiosyncratic is the precision in his design. You never grow tired of the themes and references. Like the whole Edwardian reference, which is also seminal in Japanese fashion. It was a period when Japan was opening itself up and making first contact with the Europeans. That's why you get all of the school-uniform stuff, the frock coats and the tailcoats. Junya followed on from Rei with this. He's an absolutely brilliant storyteller. The images he gives, the images you walk away with, are just so vivid, especially the silhouettes.
Robin Givhan, senior critic-at-large, *The Washington Post*: He reimagined a New Look jacket in this collection. His version had these provocative darts at the bust line that came to a sharp point. The jacket itself was cut from a boiled wool that was beautifully ravaged with bits of shredded fabric hanging from the lapel and the sleeves. As a critic, I thought it was a marvellous subversion of fashion history, and as a consumer, I was enamoured. I bought a black jacket from the collection and wore it to our office in New York. The security guard, trying to be helpful, started to point out dangling threads. He stopped himself mid-sentence: 'That's fashion, isn't it?' I think Junya would appreciate that double-take.

Spring/Summer 2006
'The Mad Capsule Markets'

Tim Blanks: What I love most about his work is that it seems to be the most perfect synthesis in fashion between high and low culture. His collections are infused by a spirit that I think is consummately punk – he is fashion's punk savant, after all – topped off with the most perfect technique. This collection in particular was all the things we love about Junya. It's his ability to take a pre-existing sub-cult and filter it through his own internal subcultural point of view. It's an alchemical transformation – I think Junya is a fabulous fashion alchemist, even if as time has passed in both men's and women's, his vocabulary has become a lot more schematized.
Simone Rocha, designer: I remember seeing this show, the one with the beautiful giant mohawks – the 'incredible sculpted-leather biker show'. It was one of the first fashion shows I ever saw in person in Paris, and it has always had a place in my heart. What I've felt in Junya since then has been a stronger androgynous energy and a use and embrace of characters.
Robin Givhan: I've always been impressed by the way he's toyed with the tenets of traditional fashion and subverted them, by his ability to take classic shapes – a trench coat, for instance – and rethink them in a myriad of ways. The one that stands out most is his fascination with punk. It's not just a subculture in his hands. He transforms it into a standard, into a dominant sensibility, and then views the world through that lens.

Autumn/Winter 2006
'Deconstruction and reconstruction'

Junya Watanabe: I am very interested in military wear as uniform. I have looked at a lot of military wear in flea markets and antique shops since I started making clothes. The 2006 collection was about deconstruction and reconstruction of uniforms, which I then used as decorative details on the garments.
Tim Blanks: I thought this collection was quintessential. The way he incorporated traditional Japanese techniques and concepts into his clothing to then create an army-surplus or Travis Bickle look. Army surplus is another one of the things he has gone back to over the years. The consistency of his inspirations suggests that it might be easy to form a profile of Junya. Even knowing very little about his actual life, you have more of a sense of him as a human being than you do with some of his peers. One of the things with Junya is that you just know him without knowing him as a person. You love him as a person just from looking at what he does.
Rory Cole, archivist, collector and founder of Junya Watanabe World: Looking back at Watanabe-san's creations from all seasons, one begins to understand the physical construction and how his work processes have evolved and adapted over time. I find his works so intriguing because of his ability to take the ordinary and recognizable and reinterpret and reinvent them in a way that creates a universe around the 'theme' itself for each collection.
Kim Jones, creative director of Dior menswear and Fendi womenswear: Junya seems timeless to me, almost ageless. Someone who doesn't know Junya would not be able to know his age. His timelessness is his beauty.

Spring/Summer 2011
'Tokyo Doll'

Junya Watanabe: It is a process of digging into one small theme and making it stronger.
Terry Jones: I think Rei was inspired by Sonia Rykiel and how certain themes ran through her collections – all those stripes and sailors' outfits – and I think it is similar for Junya. For him, it was all linked to the explosion of punk and the New Romantics.
Tim Blanks: The Breton stripes with sailors and anchors is another theme that comes back a lot. Those kinds of single-minded collections, like this one, those that started from a very early defined point and then spun off into Junya-land were the most memorable. I think that the way he chooses his references is very personal. At no point in his creative process does he sit down and say, 'This will really strike a chord this season.' There is a sort of randomness to it. It's quite audacious in a way.
Rory Cole: I am not saying every season is the most experimental and worked on, yet as they come and go, his ability to employ a working style and practice of such variety vastly outweighs any notion of repetition.

Spring/Summer 2015
'Graphic Marching'

Terry Jones: Junya's collaborations with the hair stylists, wig makers, and make-up artists have played an incredibly important role in making his shows as unique and memorable as they have been.
Junya Watanabe: The hair is designed to make the clothes look as strong as possible. I usually start to develop the image one month before the show and before communicating with the hair designer.
Tomihiro Kono, hair stylist and wig designer: The way we've worked together has been unique. He never tells me the theme of a show, doesn't show me a sketch or a dress – or even a piece of fabric. So I have to come up with my own idea – very random in the beginning – and propose many designs until Junya says yes. That process of collaboration always makes the outcome more interesting and different. I've created mainly graphic, geometric and mathematical designs of head props for Junya Watanabe. For this particular show, I was trying to create something that we'd never seen before and as I had never created anything flat like that, it was a big challenge. The concept of the head prop was a variation of a bob hairstyle but floating in the air. Junya didn't show me what kind of dresses he was making, so it was very impressive to see all the results in Paris when the clothes and head props matched perfectly together. Hair and make-up have always added a significant part to his creative vision, including the versatility of characters.
Isamaya Ffrench, make-up artist: This was the first show I ever did with Junya and the most memorable. I stuck pieces of clear Sellotape across red lipstick, which created a 2-D lip effect because it flattened the light in a way where you saw the prints of the lips coming through the lipstick. It felt like a radical moment creating something unusual with very simple methods. I always look forward to receiving his brief a few weeks before each show, wondering where he will take us next. I'm never going to do natural skin with him. It's also incredibly stimulating to look at a niche source of inspiration, whether that's a specific time and place, a style, or the psychology of a character, but to always find a new way to interpret it. It has to be seen through another lens – otherwise, how can you create something new?

Autumn/Winter 2016
'Geometries and grace notes'

Amanda Harlech: He looks at the mathematics of fashion – its geometries and grace notes – and changes the beat, dissecting them and collaging them into new configurations that sing to us.
Junya Watanabe: As I do not work based on academic ideas, I guess it is just a coincidence if this is seen in my work.
Tomihiro Kono: It's always very challenging working with Junya – and I mean that in a positive way – because it makes me expand in so many different directions. I always have to come up with a hair or wig design that suits the clothes, but the amazing thing, and I think the most important part about the way we work together, is that Junya never shows me the collection. It's more about a feeling between us, an energy, working in silence. It's always very special.
Rory Cole: It almost feels in some regards like he is creating the full costume cast for a cinematic film. His collections have such a unique existence and interpretation that each is a separate planet in the overarching solar system of Watanabe-san.
Tim Blanks: Junya can unleash the dogs and the demons in his clothes, but they are so beautifully realized that the chaos is controlled.

Spring/Summer 2017
'Spontaneous punk creativity'

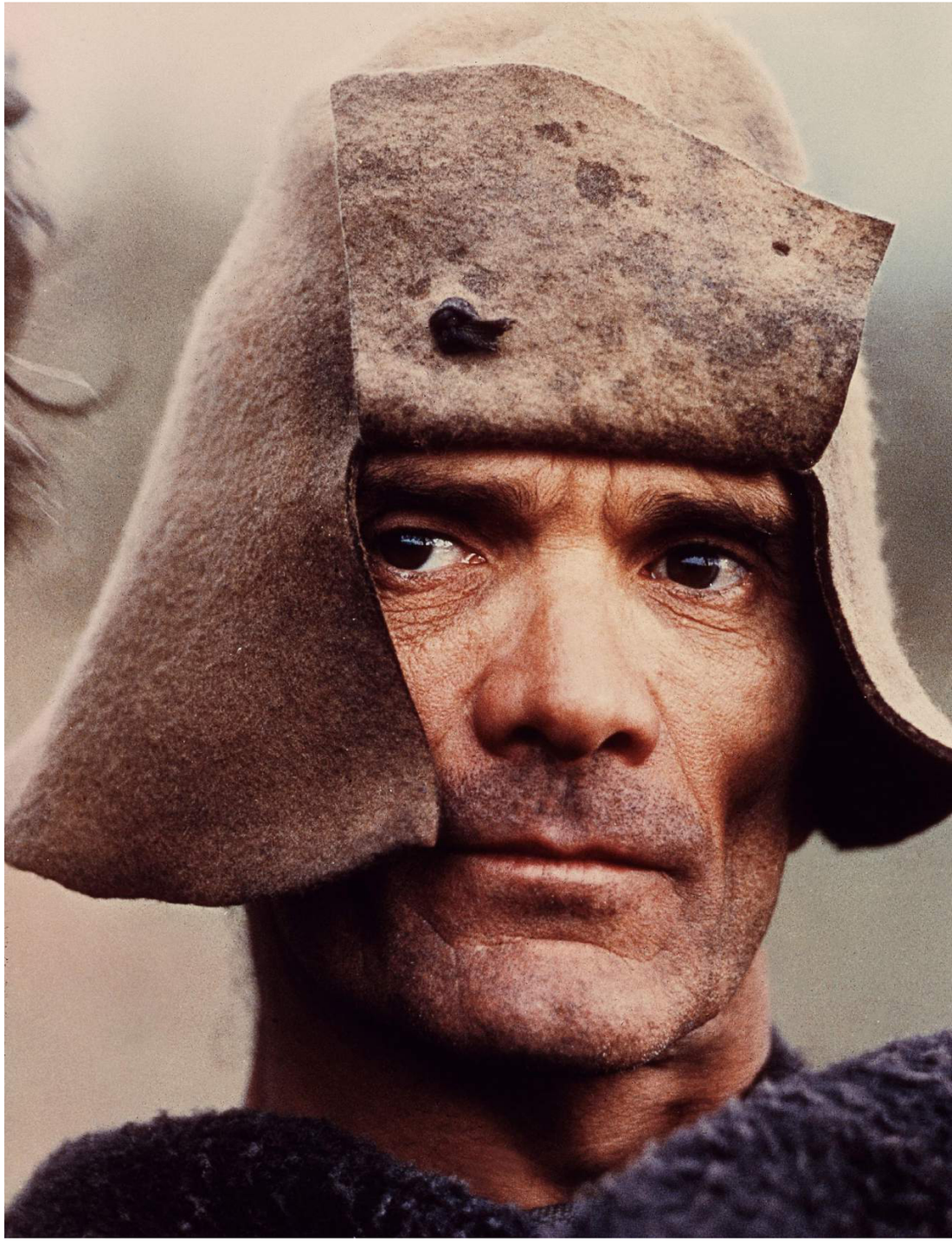
Junya Watanabe: I do not think deeply about the meaning of the word 'punk'. I do not make clothes in rebellion against anything. Punk is now just an approach in fashion terms. I'm not interested in whether my creations are radical or not.
Amanda Harlech: Subversion, subculture and punk is vital to Junya. His time spent in Berlin over the years – drawn to the city's appetite for subculture – has never left him, just as my punk reflex to couture is to wear it with trainers or a huge sweater.
Isamaya Ffrench: I love the tension between the deep intellectual process and the total spontaneous punk creativity behind all his collections, including this one. He's fully involved in all aspects of his craft. When I set up my kit and try different looks during a make-up test, he's in the corner, carefully observing everything for the whole time. No other designer does that. When I ask if he likes what I just did, he asks me to explain the look, what was on my mind, and we discuss the theme. Then he tells me what he likes and doesn't like, and we try more things. He doesn't tell me what to do; he's very respectful. It's crucial to him to see the characters he had in mind come to life to make sure they're perfectly aligned with his clothes; that's what makes the difference.
Tim Blanks: I think it's very much in the vein of making a new cult out of old cults. It's one of things I find most interesting in fashion – when you can create a fashion cult from something else.
Kim Jones: There's always something so familiar, yet so modern and new, which is very hard to carry out. I love that youthful spirit of Junya and his unexpected approach.

Autumn/Winter 2021
'Immortal Rock Spirit'

Tim Blanks: To make a band T-shirt become the most desirable item of clothing you have ever seen, transforming it into something as chic and extravagant as haute couture is classic Junya.
Rory Cole: Watanabe-san has this ability to transform 'dumb clothes', as he puts it, into magnificent and challenging wonders of adornment. He has declared that he sees his job as being but a worker, which partly explains his ability to produce incredibly varied seasons as often as he does.
Tim Blanks: Issey Miyake deliberately set out to find a traditional Japanese technique that could rival jeans; Junya's version is patchwork, which is *boro*, that really traditional Japanese philosophy of the value of the worn and the used, the beauty of things that are mended. There is a lot of that in his use of patchwork. It is one of his most graphic hybrids of East and West. If Miyake was trying to find something post-denim, Junya kind of takes it back to its roots and then creates a new hybrid out of that. He is the designer who is probably most associated with patchwork.
Amanda Harlech: It's a *boro* reverence of the past and a way of holding on to an emotional memory. The integrity of his searching – origami, *boro*, and his fascination with the reasoning behind construction, spliced with colour and texture – is the equivalent of a musician's mathematical understanding of the rhythm of life. Like watching a snowflake react to both Mozart and heavy metal, Junya reveals the way each molecule of our being responds to the time we are living through, with patchwork as a leitmotif.
Jamie Hawkesworth, photographer: I had dinner with Junya in Tokyo a few years ago after taking his portrait, and he asked me if I liked the food. I said, 'It's nice, but I prefer a cheese-and-pickle sandwich.' The next day I was hanging a show and a cheese-and-pickle sandwich arrived from Junya. We have been friends ever since.
Simone Rocha: Ultimately, what I love in his work is his commitment to creativity.
Junya Watanabe: While I am seen as a creator in the eyes of the world, I am not using design to express myself.

‘Pasolini costumes are monuments.’

Curator Olivier Saillard on the Pasolini costume archives and their discreet influence on fashion.



Interview by Thomas Lenthal
Photographs by Astra Marina Cabras

The exhibition *Pier Paolo Pasolini. Tutto è santo* (Everything is Sacred) marks the centenary of the Italian poet and film director's birth. Currently presented at Rome's Palazzo delle Esposizioni and curated by Clara Pamphili, the show brings together rarely seen documents, photographs, testimonies, letters and work archives about Pasolini. It also features a selection of costumes that were created for Pasolini's films, selected by associate curator Olivier Saillard. Organized by the film in which they appeared and exhibited on hangers – just as they are in the archives of Sartoria Farani, the company that produced them under the direction of designer Danilo Donati – the costumes, worn by both leading roles and extras, reflect many of the visual and pictorial inspirations dear to Pasolini.

towards costume design specifically?
Olivier Saillard: It's the subject of performance that interests me. I was interested in seeing clothing that wasn't attached to an era, or to a customer purchase, to consumerism, or indeed fashion.

I know that you're passionate about workwear and traditional clothing, and in particular by the traces of life left by the wearer in an item of clothing.
These costumes are just as much work clothes! It is very hard to reuse an item of stage clothing when the actor is no longer present; it's as though it has been abandoned. In Pasolini's *The Gospel According to St. Matthew* it really looks like the character spent his life in that costume. It's a beautiful exercise in painting – certainly more painting than

You're right to point that out, because with Pasolini the actor often really had to feel the costume, but perhaps differently. They would be very aware of it. Those huge dresses in boiled wool were so heavy. They were really designed to give a 'backbone' to the actor, and to deny his or her belonging to the 20th century. Those clothes really weren't the actor's friends!

Does that draw any parallels for you with fashion?
Yes. When you wear Comme des Garçons, you are first and foremost in Comme des Garçons. It's not always particularly ergonomic; it can be a bit hindering. You're not simply yourself. When you're a designer you ask yourself if you want the wearer to feel comfortable, natural – if you want them to

'I was interested in seeing clothing that wasn't attached to an era, or to a customer purchase, to consumerism, or indeed to fashion.'

In June 2021 in Rome, Olivier Saillard, along with Tilda Swinton, staged *Embodying Pasolini*, which they recently brought to Paris in December 2022. The nearly two-hour performance, which also marked the tenth anniversary of Saillard and Swinton's collaboration, saw the British actor wear a selection of 40 costumes from Pasolini's films, 'embodying' and recontextualizing them into the present moment.

System sat down with Saillard to discuss the Roman trove of Pasolini costumes, their subtle influence on contemporary fashion, and the director's idea of clothing as markers of who we are.

Thomas Lenthal: Just before we get into the work of Pasolini, I'm curious to know what it was that drew you

fashion – and especially with Pasolini, for whom colours were so important.

Were they well made?
No, not particularly. They are very simple. The big felt outfits are made like costumes for the theatre, held together with staples. I mean, it's certainly not haute couture – they are made to stay together but not to last forever. That wasn't the idea.

For Visconti, costumes had to be very real for the actor. Burt Lancaster undoubtedly thought he was the Leopard, and needed underwear consistent with the era.[1] Tucked away in the chest of drawers on set were shirts made especially for Lancaster, embroidered with the character's monogram, that were obviously never seen in the film itself.

forget what they are wearing. That's not always the case with designers like Rei Kawakubo or Yohji [Yamamoto].

When you watch Pasolini's films such as *Oedipus Rex* or *The Gospel According to St. Matthew* – the ones featuring those outsized hats – they are absolutely something you'd see at Yohji.
It's funny, I like to think that the Japanese designers, Yohji and Rei, have watched Pasolini's films. I also detect references to Pasolini in Alessandro Michele's collections at Gucci, and in Pierpaolo's at Valentino in the loose-fitting Ancient-style shape of the clothes and particularly in their decorative excess. The influence of Pasolini's costume designer Danilo Donati was sometimes very clear in Lacroix, and you could also imagine that Margiela

rummaged around in there, too. With him, there are all these photocopied images, and rough edges. Badly finished things have a sort of authority because the idea is worth more than the savoir-faire. That is quite a Pasolini notion. One could certainly draw parallels.

How did you end up getting involved with this Pasolini costume archive in the first place?
I was at a party in Florence, and I met Silvia Fendi who was with a lady called Clara Pamphili. I thought to myself, 'Goodness, Pamphili in Rome – that's a dynasty that dates back several centuries.' I spoke to Clara, and she explained her family links, as well as her own ambassadorial role in Italian art and cinema and fashion, and I just said, 'What I'd really like to see are the

Danilo Donati made costumes. For about 20 years, Donati was pretty much the only one using the atelier, but then they started taking on other commissions. Besides this, there are warehouses, too, because for *Arabian Nights* alone, there are literally hundreds of costumes for all the extras.

Did Donati make the costumes for Pasolini's period films at Farani?
Yes, always at Farani. All the costumes in the exhibition are by Sartoria Farani.

It is really well organized there?
I'm trying to help them to store things a bit better, so they get less damaged and are better protected. But they are arranged by film and are safe, so already that's something. I mean, they would be better in a museum, but frankly there are

I did ask them how come they were in such good condition, and they just said, 'Well, no one ever asks to use them!'

I think Tirelli Costumi[2] in Rome still rents out costumes, and you can see costumes from Visconti's *The Leopard* being used in productions today. I wonder why Farani goes to all this effort to preserve an inheritance that, for them, has no economic value?
They do lend out costumes, just not those from Pasolini's films. As I said, I don't think many people ask for them. There is a sort of shadow ban against Pasolini, and people are scared of delving into that. Italy isn't like France. There, he is still seen as a 'communist pederast', and especially at the moment, he isn't well regarded. So all of his costumes are just floating around. They

'With Margiela, rough edges have a sort of authority because the idea is worth more than the savoir-faire. That's quite a Pasolini notion.'

Pier Paolo Pasolini in *The Decameron* (1971). © Album/Alamy Stock Photo

costumes from Pasolini's films.' I don't know exactly why I said that because I hadn't watched Pasolini's films for a really long time. I had a bit of an idea in mind, just this sort of fetishism for Pasolini more than the costumes in particular. She replied, 'Well there's nothing simpler, because I'm one of the people who takes care of the archive.' She connects a lot of people in Rome. She also works in schools; she's a little bit involved all over the place – with designers, artists –and just happens to manage the Palazzo delle Esposizioni. So Clara took me to see the Pasolini costumes. I had no idea that they were all there.

Where are they kept? In a warehouse?
She took me to Sartoria Farani. It was a couture workshop for theatre where various costume designers including

just too many pieces for that to happen. You'd have to make an edit, but to be honest, no one dips into those costumes. The costumes for *The Canterbury Tales* weigh so much, like 20 kilos. According to Donati, every film had to have its own specific colour code and a fabric.

Amazing.
So for *The Decameron* it was felt. *The Gospel According to St. Matthew* was wool and boiled wool. *The Canterbury Tales* was incredibly heavy velvet – like 20 kilos, but it might have been nearer 30 kilos. It's almost impossible to imagine how they moved in it. I have trouble imagining how that could be used in any other production.

It's good to know that they are so well preserved.

haven't been given to museums or universities. It remains a very fragile legacy.

There's no Pasolini Foundation?
Not a foundation as such. There is an estate; there are archives. Lots of things were given to libraries, but there's no foundation. After Pasolini's death in 1975, it was [actress] Laura Betti who took care of them, but she was said to be emotionally disturbed. She had a reputation for being dreadful to everyone, calling everyone a whore, a bastard.

Along the way in your research, have you met people who knew Pasolini?
Ninetto Davoli. He acted in several Pasolini films – *La Ricotta*, *Arabian Nights* and *The Decameron*. It was very nice spending time with him. He cried. He was Pasolini's lover, I think,

before he decided to get married, and Pasolini was very hurt by that. Ninetto doesn't have dark hair any more, but it's still curly and he still has an adolescent look about him. It was really very touching. He's a very sunny sort of person.

You've mentioned Danilo Donati, who did the costumes for almost all of Pasolini's films except *Medea*, which was Piero Tosi…
That was because Maria Callas was scared of Donati's costumes! It was the first and only time she ever acted, and she was reassured by the presence of Tosi because he had already worked with her on stage at the opera. They did something very Visconti-esque, which wasn't at all to the taste of Pasolini. So once *Medea* was finished, he went straight back to Donati.

and Donati's job was to find them. In interviews, Donati talked about what Pasolini would ask of him from one film to the next, and how he would then go off and just do his own thing. He would start from an initial point of reference, like Ancient Greece or Northern Africa, and then make costumes that looked more like they were based upon the Incas. But along the way, he would create what might be called a 'universal feeling' of the costume.

I was surprised and amused by the Japanese music in *Oedipus Rex* – I thought that was a brilliant idea.
Yes, exactly. The geographic, folkloric and traditional foundations are never clarified. For the costumes for this mythological legend, he draws from the Incas, and the music is Japanese.

are like a self-contained social portrait. I think it's fair to say that Pasolini was more interested in clothing's social status than fashion.

He certainly fetishized the image of the underclass.
Yes, he was keen to represent that, and show how the bourgeoisie, the rich, were often ridiculous. He saw the 'little people' as the victims of the other. For *Mamma Roma*, he went to thrift stores and found things that were connected to the characters. He wanted to make his own costumes, and I think that was a means to access his thoughts. For *Arabian Nights*, he used existing clothes. Making costumes is a way of escaping fashion, in fact. Avoiding fashion means the film doesn't risk becoming dated. Of course, the films are dated by other things – the

'Clothes are like a self-contained social portrait. I think it's fair to say that Pasolini was more interested in clothing's social status than fashion.'

When I watched *Medea*, I didn't see any particularly radical change from Donati's work. I actually think Tosi worked very respectfully within the world of Pasolini.
It's true that it didn't represent a major stylistic departure, but there was a sort of crudeness and a cruelty in the making of Donati's costumes. It was very violent. He would rip the costumes up, he would knit them by hand, sometimes with no tools. He would dye them. It was a very wild way of undertaking costume design, which wasn't at all how Tosi worked.

What do we know about this long-standing relationship between Pasolini and Donati? How did they meet?
They met on the film *Mamma Roma*, I think: Pasolini needed civilian clothes

It's like with *The Gospel According to St. Matthew*, which wasn't filmed in the Holy Land.

It's true. When I look at his period films, I feel that they're consciously avoiding authenticity.
They aren't reconstituted frescoes.

But they are nonetheless real.
Pasolini had a realistic vision. He would go to parts of Rome where the disadvantaged lived; people on the margins of society, living in the streets, persecuted. Go back to the novels he wrote and you find passages about clothes – particularly menswear – and their relationship to poverty. How what you were wearing could work against you and your aspiration, particularly if it looked neglected or worn out. Clothes

content and so on – but not by the costumes. Pasolini was an auteur, and this was part of his vocabulary, a vocabulary in motion to distribute his thoughts.

You've mentioned before to me that *Oedipus Rex* is the film that sent you down this path.
Yes, it's my favourite. In *Oedipus Rex*, the colours are untamed. It's full of cruelty. The clothes were knitted, and almost primitive. They don't look very well researched, either historically or geographically. There are nuances of salmon colours, apart from Oedipus who is always in black, and Jocasta who is always in white. I don't know, maybe because it's the theme of the film, but I find the clothes really harrowing. But I'd still love to own a little dress from *Oedipus Rex*.

Are there lots of pieces from this film in the exhibition?
Yes, all of the *Oedipus Rex* pieces.

How did you choose the costumes for *Embodying Pasolini*, the performance with Tilda Swinton?
We took the clothes that we thought best embodied Pasolini. We took the costumes worn by the films' stars, supporting actors, and extras – the most remarkable, the most lived in, the ones that most carry our memories. In fact, the performance deals with just that: how an item of clothing that's been abandoned just after it was used can't be something that feels lived in. How when costumes are no longer on an actor but on an almost transparent pedestal, a

visitor can get close to the film. For the piece, we didn't really go back to the films, but rather to what inspired the costumes. So, for example, we looked at frescoes by Giotto and gestures that had inspired the costumes, and by going back to that, rather than the films, we got much closer to their meaning.

How many costumes are there in total?
There is a selection of approximately 80 costumes for the performance. It lasts for two hours and is on a loop for four hours. It happens mainly in silence, apart from when there's a little music that has nothing to do with the films – African music, and a piece by Chopin – and it's very brief, coming from the pockets of the costumes, not speakers in

the room itself. The clothes themselves remain humble. Working with costumes is much easier and much less dramatic than for clothing belonging to a dead historical figure. In the past, we've done performances using clothes that belonged to people like Sarah Bernhardt, Arletty or Napoleon. That was unsettling.

Yes, there was something ghostly about those performances.
You could really feel something. This Pasolini performance is really one of my favourites. I think it really succeeds in saying what is possible and what isn't, and that these Pasolini costumes are monuments because we have decided that they are.

1. The outfits – including underwear – worn by Burt Lancaster in *The Leopard* were among the more than 2,000 unique costumes created by costume designer Piero Tosi for Luciano Visconti's 1963 film. 'I gradually shape the costume on the actor,' Tosi said in a 2006 interview. 'I work on the actor, step by step. After that, one has to find the nature of the character. In the end the costume is not just clothing any more, but it becomes the skin of the character.'

2. Founded by Umberto Tirelli in November 1964, Tirelli Costumi opened with two sewing machines, five seamstresses, a milliner, a secretary and a driver-warehouse worker. It has been producing costumes for a wide variety of films ever since, including Italian productions and Hollywood blockbusters, such as Tim Burton's *Dumbo* and Paul Thomas Anderson's *Phantom Thread*. Today, the company's 6,000-square-metre warehouse in Formello, near Rome, contains over 200,000 costumes, many available for hire.

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‘You have to protect your future.’

Having fought to regain ownership of his name, Haider Ackermann is back, juggling couture and sportswear.

Interview by Jerry Stafford
Portrait by Juergen Teller; creative partner Dovile Drizyte

It's mid-October and Haider Ackermann wants to talk. Fidgeting impishly on a plush circular canapé in the middle of the couture showroom of Jean Paul Gaultier's HQ in Paris, he is visibly excited and exhilarated to be back at the helm of a legendary fashion house – if only for one season – and relishing the opportunity to elucidate upon his temporary absence from the limelight these past couple of years.

We all experienced the Covid pandemic that began in March 2020 as a collective hiatus in our so-called normal lives, but for Ackermann, the designer who turned 50 last year, it was more the extension of an *annus horribilis* that had begun in 2019, since when he and his lawyers had been battling to save his name. His former business partner Anne Chapelle had just pulled the plug on their company after almost 20 years of collaboration – she said in a September 2020 newspaper interview that the business had suffered a 'mega-loss' – during which the name Haider Ackermann and his unmistakable style synonymous with razor-sharp tailoring, sculpted leather, sensual draping and a jewel-box palette, for both men and women, had earned them *Vogue* covers and red carpets across the globe.

Chapelle effectively sacked Ackermann during the pandemic and proceeded to claim ownership of his name, potentially banishing him into fashion anonymity. The designer had suddenly found himself the main character in what is now a clichéd fashion story: one of those 'young innocents' who sell their soul to the 'evil financier' in an unsavoury Faustian pact in which it is their name rather than their soul that is unceremoniously sacrificed.

For once, this cautionary tale of ownership and identity had a happy ending for the designer. Ackermann is, after all, a survivor. A Colombian national, he was adopted by French parents from the Alsace region. His adoptive father was a cartographer and the family travelled widely across Europe and North Africa in his youth and formative years when the designer honed his creative aesthetic and embraced curiosity and conviviality. His collaborative spirit and unfailing discernment and discretion have meant that even in these challenging times his supporters within the industry and his extended family of faithful friends have never been far from his side.

In some respects, the break caused by Covid was in fact a blessing for Ackermann, as his absence from the fashion calendar or what was left of it in those months, went almost unnoticed. Then, as soon as the galas began to roll out again, there he was escorting either Timothée Chalamet or Tilda Swinton down the red carpets of international film festivals, both peacock-proud in their Ackermann plumage!

Now, with the announcements of his stewardship of the next Jean Paul Gaultier couture collection – the latest designer in an ongoing collaborative series that has so far included Sacai, Glenn Martens and most recently, Olivier Rousteing – to be presented in January 2023, and a co-branded collection in collaboration with Fila that launched in November 2022, the designer is back on the map. The skills in gender-fluid tailoring and show-stopping evening wear that he honed for his own signature collections will undoubtably reach new heights of sophistication and expertise in the new role as 'haut couturier', while his well-proven talent for high-end sportswear during a frustratingly short-lived stint at luxury brand Berluti should propel Fila firmly back into the fast lane. Ackermann may have lost his voice for a moment, but it is difficult to imagine that he will ever be silenced again.

'You have to understand, I am an adopted child, so without becoming overly emotional about it, my name is the only thing I carry from my parents.'

Jerry Stafford: It must be great to be back in the studio and working once again on a collection. How do you feel?
Haider Ackermann: Great! Today I was really looking forward to talking to you, because I haven't been talking to anyone about my work for ages, so just the idea of being able to express myself is really joyful; it is a real joy to be working again, a real joy to feel alive and to feel my heart beating fast and to experience the nervousness, the anxieties, and the excitement of these two beautiful projects. Yes, it's wonderful, really delicious.

Let's talk about the period of time which led up to these two projects, and look at the last couple of years, which have been challenging for everyone in the fashion industry and beyond. You have been particularly affected over the past two years when your business closed amid rumours of litigation between you and the owner, Anne Chapelle. Can we talk a bit about the beginning and the evolution of this relationship? Why do you feel it ended

up in the hands of the lawyers?
I had been working alone for years to build this company of mine. I had started everything on my own and then a hand reached out to me and I was faced with a question of trust. It was the trust you have as a young person wanting to be a designer and wanting to create a collection and be part of a certain world. You put your trust in the hands of someone else, which is in itself a beautiful idea, but at the same time tremendously naive. I always used to say to people, dream your dreams, follow your heart, but time has taught me that you also have to be very anchored in reality and protect yourself, especially as a young designer. You have to immediately surround yourself with lawyers. It sounds harsh what I am saying but you have to protect your future.

I am an adopted child, so without becoming overly emotional about it, my name is the only thing I carry from my parents. That is the only thing I have. There is no way in the world I would have given my name to someone else. To have your name on licences is supposed to be a collaboration; it is supposed to mean building up a company together and being on the same page about where one would like to take it. Obviously we had our differences and of course, one cannot escape what happened over the last few years but at the same time there is no reason to… all I can say is that now I can breathe again. I feel free and liberated again, and I am overjoyed at being able to work.

Was there a positive working relationship with her, when your business was developing and you were very much the focus of the fashion world, or was there always this sense of ambiguity over ownership and trust?
There was always this sense of ambiguity, this fear of ownership and, perhaps the weirdest thing – and I've never told this to anyone – is that the day I was supposed to sign, I could not.

Sign with Chapelle ?
Yes. I could not put my signature on the paper. The gesture just didn't come. We had to postpone the meeting and meet up again another day for me to sign. This should have been a sign of things to come! I knew it wasn't right. It wasn't a smooth gesture and perhaps I should have read between the lines. I am sure she might have had the best intentions, but…

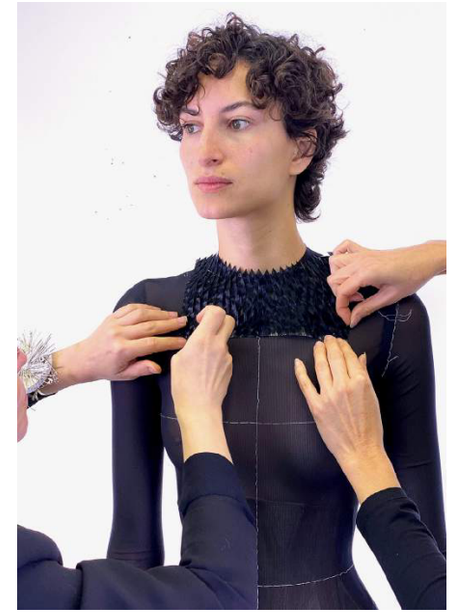
Do you think your decision to work with Berluti affected your relationship with her? Did it drive a wedge even further between you?
Of course. No one likes to feel like the other woman and she probably felt this way. I cannot speak for her, but one should be generous and embrace someone else's future, and she didn't want to embrace my success or my future… It was very ambiguous, almost as if she wanted me to be there but not be there at the same time.

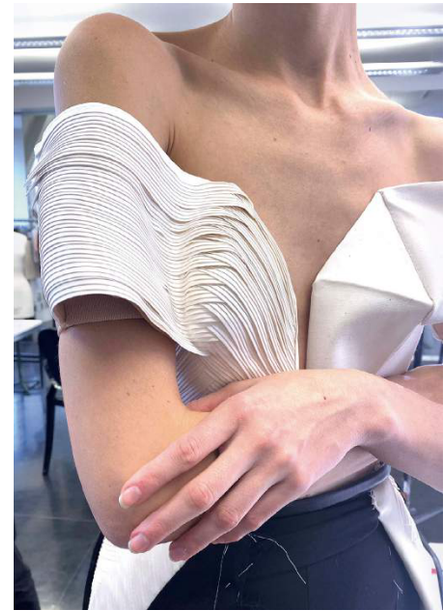
Do you accept the idea that she is a businesswoman and all her decisions are consequently made outside of any artistic or creative consideration, and in this kind of relationship there has to be an understanding between art and commerce?
If there is an understanding between art and commerce then you need to surround yourself with marketing directors, commercial directors, and, as a designer, you have to work hand in hand with the business. I never had that conversation and that dialogue, even though I was always searching for it and requesting it. I mean, fantasy is one thing, but you also need to engage in reality and at the end of the day, success is about selling. That is the price, that is what keeps you going, that is what helps you move onto the next collection and grow. I would have loved to have this conversation and exchange. That was why Berluti was such a wonderful experience because suddenly I had someone in front of me with whom I could talk, who could help me to learn and to grow. It was a wonderful adventure.

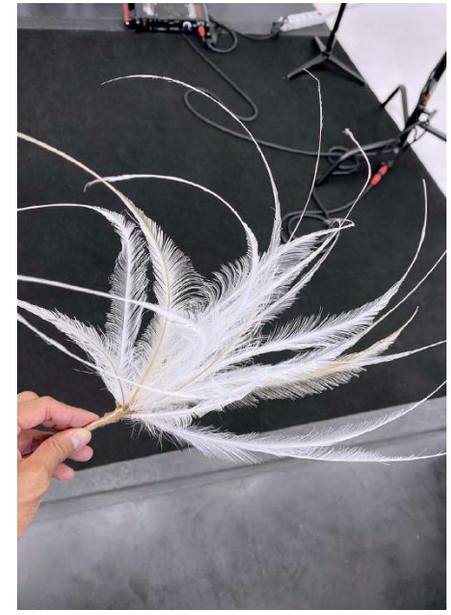
'It is tricky to accept that people can continue using your name to do tracksuit and sweatshirt licences without you being involved. It's a violent blow!'

Would you nonetheless say that Anne Chapelle was the first person to recognize your talent and support you financially?
No. The first person who recognized my talent was [fashion publicist] Michèle Montagne. She was the first to see something in me and she has been my backbone ever since. She was the one who believed in me from the start and spread the message to the fashion world.

Did you sense from early on in your relationship with Anne Chapelle that you had signed an almost Faustian pact with her? From the very beginning you were aware that she was going to own your name?
She only had my name in licences, which is very different; I never wanted to sign over my name. You have to understand,







After the experience of these past years, are you more conscious of the importance of ownership and independence, and are they now the driving force behind your modus operandi?
Yes, the more you feel free, the more generous you are. You are no longer putting yourself in the firing line for nothing – you just want to grow and experience, to be alive and take on all those challenges. I am totally embracing my future again.

While all these changes were going on in the company and Anne Chapelle had removed you as a designer, the Covid pandemic was playing out, so your absence from the fashion calendar seemed less remarkable. Obviously this played to your advantage.
Yes it did. I didn't want to wash my dirty laundry out in public; there is nothing interesting about doing that. The timing played to my advantage, and I have spent most of my time since then surrounded by lawyers fighting to get my name off those licences. Meanwhile, collections have been done with my name on them, but without me, to sell tracksuits and sweatshirts. And yes, it is very tricky to accept that people can use your name to continue those licences without you. It is quite a violent blow! You are screaming out to be part of it, to be able to check it, to view it, but you can't.

Were you at all concerned about how you would be perceived by the fashion world at that time?
No, the only concern I had was to fight and get my name back. I had worked so hard for all those years, so there was no one in the world who was going to take that away from me. I prefer discretion, it is a protection, and there were all these things going on in the world and so people weren't interested in me.

Never complain, never explain. Very British! You were also very lucky because as soon as things opened up again, you were able to work independently on high-profile red-carpet events with two of your long-term collaborators, Tilda Swinton and Timothée Chalamet. Was this something that you consciously initiated to maintain your profile?
Yes, and I was also very lucky to be supported by those two people, to share their faithfulness and loyalty at a time when all this was going on in my little life. Even knowing what the rest of the fashion world didn't, Tilda and Timothée kept knocking on my door and wanting me to be out there with them. I owe them – and, of course, you, Jerry[1] – a lot for allowing me to maintain this presence on the fashion circuit where people could still see me, like a glimpse of my absence. It was very strange being out there and then disappearing again. It was necessary for me also to feel alive, to exist.

Let's talk about Tilda as you have been working together for a long time now. Why do you think your collaboration works so well and how do you think it might develop in the future?
It has been 20 years and if we actually go back to the beginning of this friendship, you were the person who introduced Ms Swinton to me personally and professionally – you are the basis of this whole friendship. She has been a play companion all those years since and it is so important to feel supported and surrounded in this way. One doesn't talk enough about friendship in our field, and for me, the word friendship goes hand in hand with the word trust. The fact that you support each other, you stand by each other, you are companions, you are comrades, and as the years go by, you challenge each other, you go further, you experience good things and sad things, but this continuity is enriching and makes you stronger. There is nothing more beautiful than that. I am really touched by such loyal friends; it is my luxury.

'Haider
Came into my life over 20 years ago as
an inspired and inspiring designer
Whose fluidity, sharpness and freshness
of line spoke to me immediately of a rare
and thrilling atmosphere.

My first dress from him was liquid gold
And it set the tone:

Eternally supersonic
Effortlessly elegant
Innately rock and roll.
A dream of boundarylessness
Beyond time, beyond gender, beyond
geography.

Since that first encounter, he has
become, beyond one of my most cher-
ished and eternal collaborators, a friend
of my closest heart
Truly my brother
One of my sweetest life companions

'Monsieur Gaultier chooses you to do his couture, but then he steps back. He doesn't want to hear any more about it; he just wants to be surprised.'

Whose intimate sensitivity, friendship and loyalty is beyond rubies to me.

To travel the planet with Haider – as I have done now for years on our yearly odysseys – is my favourite of all adventures.

If the shapes we make together are high on my heap of treasures, the NEVER-ENDING FUN we have together – WHEREVER AND WHENEVER – is among my life's most precious jewels of all.'

Tilda Swinton

How did you meet Timothée?
It was all accidental. It happened when I was working for Berluti and I got a request from Brian Swardstrom [agent for Chalamet and Swinton], asking if I would be interested in meeting the young Chalamet. It was his first red carpet in Berlin, for *Call Me by Your Name*; I didn't know what would happen afterwards – I didn't see it coming. Sometimes you meet someone, and you just know you can build a story together and have a moment together that may really last.

'Haider is one of my closest friends and a creative from a lost era – his is the rare passion that cares about the purity of design, shapes, colours, textures, and the feelings they evoke. He couldn't possibly pretend to care about a fashion cycle or algorithm-influenced trends – his talent and creativity are set to last because he is following his own drum beat, no one else's.'

Timothée Chalamet

The two most recent collaborations were at this year's Venice Film Festival, and both were very impactful. Let's talk first about Timothée; how did the idea for that silhouette evolve? That backless red shantung waistcoat and love handles went viral and was a huge moment for you!
[Laughs] It was just about questioning. We talk a lot about transgender and gender fluidity, which I am of course intrigued by, but not particularly attached to. What I do find interesting, though, is the vanity of men, and how men are vainer than they used to be; they are more challenging. Timothée is in full view at the moment, so we wanted to create a moment and raise questions, to see how far we could go with something, to see what could be done with a man who is very masculine showing his sensibility, showing his nudity. Why is nudity always about women? That questioning came about when we were just playing together. I noticed the assurance he had when he started walking and looking at himself in the mirror, and I was like, OK, we have to do something challenging as you feel so confident and you look at yourself with such self-assurance. There was all this seductive energy going on and I was like we have to do this. It was not prepared and it was not calculated. There were no stylists around; it was just him and me playing around, and that is how it came across. That is the beauty of our businesses: when you're with a close group of people, you can build and create together. Nowadays, the industry is so big and you have to be surrounded by so many people with so many opinions that you lose perhaps these kind of special moments.

Tilda's silhouette was equally impactful in Venice this year. Did you approach that silhouette knowing already that you had the position at Gaultier Couture? Did you approach that dress as a couture silhouette, more so than you might have done in the past? Did you want her to project on a different level?
Perhaps, and perhaps unconsciously it also affected my work with Timothée. Lately I've been looking at all the archives and Monsieur Gaultier had already begun subverting the codes like 20 or 30 years ago; it is almost ridiculous when you look back on it. It is immense! He played with fashion on every cultural level and let's face it, he did a naked back on a guy 30 years ago! I only realized last week, looking back at all the archives, that everything has been done before, which is fascinating and beautiful. So perhaps unconsciously all this was playing in my head, which just gave me the freedom to play after having been this prisoner for such a long time, for these two long years!

Did you really feel like a prisoner?
Yes. I couldn't breathe for so many years, not knowing where my future would go or if I would be able to work again, because it felt to me like she would do everything to keep me small.

To keep you personally feeling unimportant and undervalued or to keep the business small and not expand it?
I think one is related to the other. To keep me small as a person and play with my insecurities. It was a very damaging and perverted relationship. Absolutely! You scream all those years in silence, but there is no sound coming out, and so perhaps I'm feeling free again and I just wanted to embrace my world and the joy of working. I wanted Tilda to shine, and I wanted Timothée to shine, and I really wanted to be out there questioning myself again!

And you did an amazing job! Another project you worked on during this period was with Timothée for Afghanistan Libre, a human-rights association, for which you created a sweatshirt to raise money for and awareness about the rights of Afghan women. How did this come about? Why did you want to do this with him particularly?
I was raised in Ethiopia, Chad and Algeria – countries with big Muslim populations – and the women in these countries have always been such a part of my vision and my creativity, so the idea that men could deny these Afghan women their education and their only way to exist as people revolted me. Women and girls are being reduced to silence and deprived of their liberty, and their courage is incredible as they risk their lives to defend their basic human rights on a daily basis. I had to do something. I had to be out there and raise money and talk about it. I am doing haute couture now, which is all about embracing femininity, the adoration and sublimination of a woman. And suddenly you have all these women in Afghanistan and in Iran, whose lives are in peril. These are issues about which we have to talk.

You have been very open in your support of the protests taking place in Iran at the moment, so does politics have a place in the fashion industry?
Yes, of course, it is about freedom, and freedom is having no fear, as Nina Simone so justly says. My purpose is not to be politically engaged; I want to celebrate the beauty of each person and give them freedom in their movements and gestures. It is shameful to see what is happening. I cannot understand why people are so silent about it in our industry – no one talks about what is happening in Iran. We need to look at what is happening around the world; everything is related.

You have of course been approached by other people to work either as a designer or a creative consultant. Kanye West, aka Ye, has always been a big fan of your work and has approached you in the past to work with him. Did you ever seriously consider doing that?
No, I think the man has his own creativity but… it's really strange to talk about it now [in late October]. I had the feeling that it wouldn't be a healthy relationship for me. I had come out of such a damaged one that everything I wanted to do and wanted to embrace needed to be an extension of my own art and my own gesture. I don't think I would have had this working relationship with Kanye in spite of the fact that I do really respect his music and work…

So this brings us up to the present day and the announcement of your collaboration with the Italian sports company Fila,[2] and your appointment as the next couture designer at Gaultier Haute Couture, following Glenn Martens and Olivier Rousteing. Here we are at the Jean Paul Gaultier headquarters in Paris[3] where you are currently doing fittings. When did you start to design this collection, because I am sure the creative process started a long time before the announcement was actually made?
Yes, we started in July, as soon as Olivier was finished, when I entered this beautiful building and started to go through all the archives to explore the work of Monsieur Jean Paul Gaultier, which as I said before is extraordinary, amazing! I was less aware of how deeply his work embraced cultures and questioned society. Everything that we are talking about now, he addressed 20 years ago. People know all about his fantasy, his *folie* and his joyfulness, but there is a real couturier behind all of this – a man who in his early couture shows does the best tailoring! To touch haute couture has always been a dream of mine. I have a feeling I am suddenly doing everything I wanted to do. It really is like a beautiful gift.

What is your relationship with Jean Paul himself and how did your initial conversations with him pan out?
Jean Paul, Monsieur Gaultier, chooses you and obviously I feel very honoured to be chosen, but then he steps back. He doesn't want to hear any more about it; he wants to be surprised. So we met, we went to his place, we had dinner one night, and talked more about his love life and our sex lives than anything else. I wanted to capture every word to inspire me in my work, because it is all about the language, and yet at the same

'Jean Paul Gaultier had already begun subverting the codes of fashion 20 or 30 years ago. He was playing with it on every cultural level.'

'Fila is my youth. When we were young, we all wore Fila. I also remember seeing Fila in the Wes Anderson movie, *The Royal Tenenbaums*.'

time, we had so much more in common than I ever thought we would have, so it is a very interesting journey.

Did you not talk about fashion at all? Or the way that you perceive his work or the way he perceives your work?
Not at all! Perhaps I wanted it to go that way, but I wanted to give him carte blanche to talk about whatever he wanted, and I just listened like a little kid listening to his master. He was living and working in an era when it was all about freedom. When we bumped into each other at a Grace Jones concert in London earlier this year, he told me he started in 1974, I mean…

What is your relationship with Puig, the current owners of Gaultier? Do you work closely with the people there?
I just work with Monsieur Gaultier's creative team; they are the only people with whom I am in daily contact, and those are the only conversations that I have. When they say it is carte blanche, it really is. I have only had conversations with Antoine Gagey, the general manager at Gaultier…

About where you would like to take things creatively?
Yes, but then again, there is trust…

So there are no real guidelines?
No, no. There is a beauty in having a different designer each season, even if that might be very difficult for the patternmakers upstairs with a different hand and a different designer every time, but they have to recreate this bond, which is interesting for them. We are totally free to do whatever we would like to honour Monsieur Gaultier.

So are they all the same *petites mains* who worked with Jean Paul?
Yes.

The same atelier, all of them?
Yes, which is really charming. Haute couture is such a moving experience because you work with people who are so passionate. The plumassiers, the embroiderers, all the *petites mains* – these are people who spend hours and hours doing their work and can talk for hours about it. There is such passion.

How many people work there?
Approximately 20. The most beautiful gift of haute couture is the opportunity to really take the time to do something.

Is it a completely new way of working for you? All your experience and formation has led to this, so do you feel that it is a natural progression for you? Are you comfortable in this role?
I feel totally comfortable to be honest, and I feel strangely less insecure than I would normally be. I really enjoy it because I am learning every day. Every day is a new day; it is interesting and fascinating. I am growing every day which is the best gift I could receive.

What is your vision for this collection? I mean how are you balancing the visual and creative heritage of Jean Paul Gaultier with your own vision, because Haider Ackermann has to be present in the story…
Tailoring has been a big part of Jean Paul's work and mine, too, so this is a common playground, and something to continue. I think there are many points where we touch. It is a dance. I am taking a dance here, and that is very, very nice; yes, it is really beautiful.

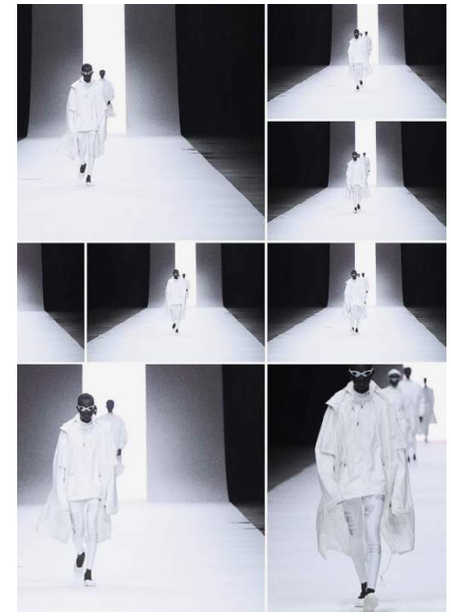
So why do you think you were chosen to head up this collection? Why do you think Jean Paul approached you?
I didn't dare ask him! I would love to ask him after the show and hopefully I will succeed and make him proud that he chose me this season. It is good that I do not know as it has given me total freedom, otherwise I might have been more restrained and focused on those reasons.

Have you met any of the couture clients?
No, I haven't. I have met the director of the haute-couture department and requested to see images of all the best clients in the world, to know their faces, to know where they live, which is interesting.

It is important.
Very, as I would like this couture to sell. I would like it to be worn. I have always been seduced by couture and the idea that a woman can be transported by these fabrics and that she can feel like the most beautiful woman in the world. I would like people to buy this collection – and I would like to see the figures afterwards!

Do you not think that it's important for you to start meeting the clients themselves before the show?
I don't think I want to meet them. I just wanted to know where they were

'Couture and sportswear are no longer detached from one another. Look at the couture client in LA: she's also running in sneakers and jogging pants.'



coming from, what their jobs are, what they are about, what are their favourite pieces at Jean Paul Gaultier, what are they searching for related to Jean Paul. Because one needs to be quite eccentric and daring to wear Jean Paul Gaultier; it's not the easiest choice. There are lots of people in the art world, lots of eccentric ladies out there, but…

Jean Paul Gaultier has also done exquisitely classical pieces that are incredibly easy to wear.
Absolutely, in his early couture work, which is where I would like to take my work. I am guided by these very pure perfect pieces and less by the folkloric aspect.

How do you think the last three designers for the house – Sacai, Martens and Rousteing – approached the challenge? Were they successful?
Each one, in their own very different way, composed a love letter to Jean Paul Gaultier. Glenn was more serene and discreet and more Belgian about his approach compared to how Olivier honoured all the iconic pieces.

Have you felt any pressure to impress and to come back with a big bang or are you happy to take it slowly and ease back into the saddle?
I don't know why, but I have this confidence. I feel that everything is going to be alright. I am here and am so happy to work, so I will not let any of my insecurities distract from this moment, although being insecure does also help push you forward in a certain way. January 25 will be a beautiful evening.

Let's move from couture to sportswear.
Yes, from one world to another!

You have done a collection for Fila, produced in Milan where you have been commuting these past months and which launches on November 17 in Manchester. So tell me about how this collaboration came about?
It was Fila who contacted me, at first to do a capsule collection, like they had done in the past with Fendi.

When you say Fila contacted you, was there one person specifically?
Valerio [Innella], who is the head of press there, contacted me one night and asked if I would be interested in working with Fila. Of course, it has become a trend for every designer to work with a sports brand so when they first approached me, I made it clear that I wanted to do co-branding rather than just a quick capsule. That means that on every piece we design there is both Fila's name and my name. For a time my name was not out there, so now I feel like screaming it out everywhere. [Laughs] Even if I always embraced discretion before! So it's not simply a small capsule, but a real collection and we are working on swimming trunks, hats, scarves and jumpers!

My next question was exactly that, what does the collection include, and have you done a sneaker?
Of course we've done a sneaker! We do flip-flops and jogging pants, too!

Is it all sportswear pieces?
Fila is my youth. When we were young, we all wore Fila. I remember seeing Fila in the Wes Anderson movie, *The Royal Tenenbaums*. It was quite high-end back in the day, but now it is more a suburban trend where all the kids are wearing it. I think the reason they chose me was to put them back onto the fashion map and to re-establish their credibility within the fashion industry, so it is a balance between sportswear and casualwear.

So casualwear is also part of the proposal. And what is the price range? Will it be sold as limited editions or is it a big production roll out?
This is one of the first times that Fila's main house is doing its own collection with a designer like me. So we are selling worldwide; every country is involved. I was interested in collaborating with them because my work has always been very niche and selective, and I wanted it to be out there on the streets. I want the kids to wear sweatshirts I designed!

'There are all these young kids out there who have a valid voice. So I wanted to understand if I still had something to say creatively and commercially.'

Why did you decide to present the collaboration in Manchester?
The city has an intriguing mix of contrasting cultures. It's a place where we hear the voice of youth. There has always been an interesting new wave in sports, music and literature, and I wanted to focus on this unique point of view. It felt right to present the work in the kind of abandoned warehouse space where massive rave parties were held.

Have you discussed sustainability and supply chains with Fila? Are you comfortable with how they work with human-rights and environmental groups?

Yes. They are very concerned with all aspects of this conversation, and more is going to come. I don't know if I can reveal anything in detail yet, but I know a director [head of global strategic marketing Luca Bertolini] is going to talk at the COP27 summit, just before our show.

It is so important! You are at an interesting and transitional point in your career working in two seemingly diametrically opposed domains – sportswear and couture – but which in current fashion terms are powerfully complementary. Everyone aspires to couture, but we all know what sells is sportswear. How do the two respond to each other in your work?
The two things are very connected, just look at the couture client. You will also find her in sneakers and in jogging pants running down the street in LA, so these worlds are not detached from each other! There is a really interesting exchange, one that helps me in my process to make something modern and relevant. It is very now! I would have never thought I would do this, but it is also what designers these days are about.

Yes, both are highly technical, but one is industrial and the other is artisanal…
Yet some aspects and techniques of sportswear will definitely find their way into the haute couture.

Where does this now leave Haider Ackermann and your own brand identity?

We've talked today about ownership and independence, so now you have your name back and you are the master of your own destiny, where do you see yourself going? Do you want to work for another house, or do you want to hang onto this hard-won independence?
I just want to continue on my path, step by step. All I want to do is work and enjoy everything I am doing, and surround myself with healthy people who have the best intentions to collaborate. Of course you want to express yourself through your own house, but I'm not 25 any more, and I look at things differently now. My approach is very different; I now know what I do and don't want to do. I am more directive. When I knew I was finally free from any contractual ties, I met with people from the press and from retail to try to understand if I still had a role to play and a voice in the industry.

And what was your conclusion?
You really question yourself, because during those two years of silence, fashion was moving forward very fast. Now there are all these young kids out there who have a valid voice. I just wanted to understand if I still had something to say creatively and commercially. Apparently I do.

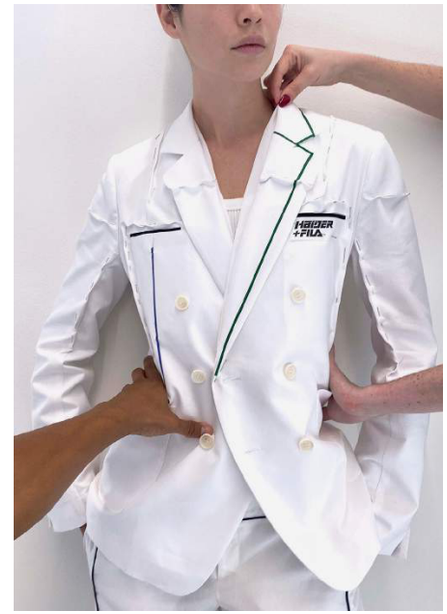
Social media is a great way of owning or reclaiming one's voice and it seems to me that it has been very important to you at a time when your identity has been challenged professionally and personally. Has it been a conscious choice?
Yes, because it is a direct voice, speaking directly to your clients and the people who respect you. It is a conversation. Even though I was very scared of social media and I had a complicated relationship with it in the past, I learned – especially at a time when my voice and my name had been taken away – that it was the only honest way to embrace and express both my work and all the people who make it happen. Because of course there is me, but there is also my assistant, friends, a whole gang around me, who are a part of why I am still here today. If I am standing straight today it is because of the backbone of the friends who didn't give up on me!

Lastly, as a Colombian-born gay man adopted by French parents who has had to fight once again for the ownership of his name, how do you see yourself at this time?
Well, it is an endless fight but, you know, beauty has grown out of all this negativity and all these fights. There has been a strength in these friendships and in the support from the industry. It was wonderful when the collaborations with Fila and Jean Paul Gaultier were announced, how other designers reacted. All the messages, all the generosity I received from the industry, it makes your heart melt, because you feel you really have a right to exist.

1. Jerry Stafford is Tilda Swinton's long-time stylist.

2. Fila was founded in Biella, Italy, in 1911, by brothers Ettore and Giansevero Fila. The company was bought by its Korean subsidiary in 2007 for around $350 million and is now based in Seoul.

3. Since 2004, Jean Paul Gaultier's Parisian headquarters have been at 325 Rue Saint-Martin in Paris. The Belle Époque-style building, constructed in 1912 for a mutual insurance company, Avenir du Prolétariat (Future of the Proletariat), was designed by architect Bernard-Gabriel Belesta. Once known as the Palais du Prolétariat (Palace of the Proletariat), it is dominated by a monumental staircase that leads to a large ballroom (where Gaultier has long held his shows). After Avenir du Prolétariat left the building in the early 1930s, the building was used as a ribbon factory, a boxing club, (porn) cinema, and a night club-restaurant called Charivari. Gaultier purchased the 5,000m² building in 2001, renting it in 2002 to Socialist presidential candidate Lionel Jospin for his campaign headquarters (he lost), before renovating it at a cost of €7 million.



Portrait post-production by Lucas Ríos Palazesi at QuickFix.

‘My clothes are like pages in a journal.’

Raul Lopez opens up about the ‘urban dystopia’ of his childhood in 1990s Williamsburg, the salvation he found through the ballroom scene, and how he’s turned Luar into the hottest New York fashion label in years.

Interview by Rana Toofanian
Photographs by Philip-Daniel Ducasse
Styling by Kyle Luu

Previous page: Raul Lopez, Luar's founder and designer, wears runway draped boulder-shoulder dress by Luar, and his own shirt and accessories. Above: Sydney, artist and DJ, wears rhinestone logo tank top, runway denim tube skirt, denim boulder-shoulder jacket draped over skirt, and runway custom eyewear, all by Luar.

Sinn Apsara, model, wears boulder-shoulder pullover and runway nylon tube skirt, tan ostrich Ana belt, and Luar name belt, all by Luar.

Sabrina Arroyave, junior designer at Luar, wears boulder-shoulder belted button-up dress and runway denim tube skirt, both by Luar.

Kyle Luu, stylist, wears black bomber tech jacket by Luar.

Brandon Blackwood, designer and friend of Raul Lopez, wears croc embossed cognac belted trench, hybrid tech trousers, and runway velvet gloves, all by Luar, and designer's own hat and accessories.

Diane Lopez, Raul Lopez's cousin, wears white ostrich embossed geo jacket, runway diamond high-low skirt, and sunglasses, all by Luar.

Sinn Apsara wears crocodile embossed cognac Alta blazer,
runway nylon tube skirt, and runway silver hoops, all by Luar.

Sydney wears mesh boulder-shoulder jacket, pinstripe web trousers,
runway leather mules, and custom runway eyewear, all by Luar.

Ashley Arias, Raul Lopez's cousin, wears cropped logo crewneck, boulder-shoulder button-up top, runway custom pinstripe high-low skirt, Ana belt, and runway leather mules, all by Luar.

Make-up: Raisa Flowers. Hair: Joey George. Production: FAMILY Projects. Olivia Gouveia. Lighting director: Jupiter Jones. Photography assistant: Nikolai Hagen. Styling assistant: Tonya Huynh. Production assistant: Myles Gouveia.

Guillaume Boucher, content director at Luar, wears tri-colour bomber tech jacket by Luar and his own trousers.

'Premium trash.' That's how designer Raul Lopez describes his personal style. Yet his reverse namesake label, Luar, which is upending industry hierarchies by prioritizing authenticity and community over status quo, has become one of the most exciting brands to show at New York Fashion Week in years.

Lopez was already a fashion insider when he launched Luar over a decade ago. As a teenager he was part of New York's ballroom scene, a Black- and Latino-led LGBTQIA+ subculture that organizes beauty pageants and voguing competitions for community members. It was here that, aged 16, he met Shayne Oliver. A friendship quickly formed, catalysed by their mutual appreciation for each other's outfits, and in 2006 the duo founded Hood By Air with the then-innovative aim of bridging the gap between streetwear and luxury fashion. In 2010, before Hood By Air's rapid rise to success, Lopez left the brand and travelled to the Dominican Republic to reconnect with his roots.

Having spent months observing the ways local Dominican men and women dressed, Lopez founded Luar in 2011 as a way to celebrate his Hispanic heritage. Luar – then named Luar Zepol – quickly became synonymous with a combination of redefined basics and sharp tailoring, two design staples that were all the more pronounced in the brand's triumphant Spring/Summer 2023 collection. Models in double-breasted jackets with oversized lapels, dropped-waist silk dresses, nylon tech jackets, and bold-shouldered blazers walked down the runway in a powerful tribute to Lopez's family get-togethers in Brooklyn at which aunts and uncles would dress in their finest ensembles under unassuming sports jackets. For Lopez, the brand is simply a way of, in his words, giving back 'to these people who have influenced my life'. It hasn't always been smooth sailing for Luar or Lopez, however. He has been forced to put the brand on hold twice since 2011, most recently in 2019 as a result of mental burnout. The break, it seems, did his vision good. Luar has recently topped the lists of New York fashion's buzziest names not least because of its popular Ana bag, which, in November, helped earn Lopez the American Accessory Designer of the Year Award at the 2022 CFDA Fashion Awards.

Following the launch of the Spring/Summer 2023 collection and shortly after Lopez was named one of *Time* magazine's 100 most influential people in the world, the designer sat down with *System* to discuss the influence of his Dominican roots, ballroom culture, and how people-watching has shaped the star-studded evolution of Luar.

Rana Toofanian: You were born and raised in Brooklyn?
Raul Lopez: In Williamsburg, Brooklyn. I still live in the same building I grew up in.

Describe Brooklyn in the 1990s. What was life like?
It was a beautiful, urban dystopia. It was what we knew, and what was around us. I really loved it. I'm first generation, and it was great to see people older than me hustle and build new lives for everyone coming after them. There was a sense of survival mode that pushed you to seek things out. Even in terms of clothing, there was the challenge of trying to look good in a shitty dump. There's a really good documentary filmed in 1984 called *Los Sures*[1] – which means South Williamsburg – about the neighbourhood, which was then predominantly Latino.

Tell me a bit about your upbringing.
I come from a Dominican Republic Latino household. It was survival of the fittest – my dad worked as the super in the building I grew up in, and my mom worked in factories in the Garment District alongside her siblings and other relatives. This upbringing has influenced my DNA, and the DNA of the brand itself, in that the hustle and bustle and grind is to make something beautiful. I hustle in the same way with Luar as my family did to give us this beautiful life. I had a crazy upbringing of being this gay boy stuck in an era where you weren't allowed to be yourself, living in fear and acting on it by building a [mental] wall in my everyday life. I also developed a tough skin in order to walk through the streets and hold my own – that was what the neighbourhood required, too. I was not allowed to relish the gay manifestations of the kids who were running around, although it was very rare to see [overtly] gay people back then. It's the way I was brought up and the way I perceived my neighbourhood that made me the person that I am today. It was tough, but I made it work despite all the noes I was met with.

You mentioned that your mother and grandmother worked in the Garment District. What were your earliest memories of fashion, and what access to and awareness of it did you have back then?
I watched my mom and these women, these central figures in my household, get dressed as a way for them to feel good about this really shit life they were living in this urban dystopia. The mindset was like, 'I may live here, but I am going to look good'. They were always dressed up – always! Even on a regular day, they would wear really beautiful, oversized sweaters, and well-tailored pants. My mom wore heels every day, and my Aunt Sue and my grandmother were always telling me that, when you wake up, you need to do your face and your hair before your husband sees you. It was super old school, but I found it really chic. Even the prostitutes in my neighbourhood wore these insane outfits. I was always blown away like, 'Goddam, what the hell?' I think it all stems from the matriarchy in my family and how they carry themselves. The way they dressed and presented themselves to everyone was luxury.

When did you realize you wanted to design and make clothes for a living?
We would have these family functions when things would really go off. There were weddings, but it was at the *quinceañeras* and 'sweet sixteen' parties where everyone was decked out. Then there were my family reunions, which took place every month, which would take it to another level. My family would get these really beautiful garments from nowhere – these guys didn't have any money, but they were trying to live this American luxury dream. It was a dump of a place, but they always put on their best looks. That was when I was like, 'I want to make stuff; I want women or men to like this; I want to make people feel good when they wear my stuff.' It wasn't about having everyone say, 'Oh you look fab', but rather about making me feel and fit into the status quo of what America feels is luxury. Later, I wasn't actually allowed to go to fashion school, so I taught myself. There was an industrial sewing machine in my house because the women in my family were either making clothing for us or creating curtains and pillow cases. In that sense I was always exposed to sewing, even if I wasn't allowed to partake in it. That is also how I figured out my way of rebelling. Instead of doing drugs, like any typical teenage rebellion, I would go to the library, which was like spit in their faces. I'd go behind their backs and sneak into the Fashion Institute of Technology or Parsons to try and gain knowledge. I would also rip pages out of textbooks when I was in high school, which was my only opportunity to see what goes into the physical construction of clothes. That was my thing. I clearly remember my first time seeing a Lacroix show. It was on Fashion TV in New York, a channel I wasn't allowed to watch. For some reason, I got to watch this particular show and I was so blown away. I was like, 'Woah, this is exactly who I am.'

How did this interest you had in fashion and dressing up translate into your everyday life?
I always wanted to stand out. When I was a kid in elementary school, I had to wear a suit every day. If you were to ask my mom, she would tell you I was called 'Little Tie' back then because I always wore a suit and tie. If I hadn't had a suit, I wouldn't have gone to school! I think that was when my mom was like, 'OK, we know you're with the girls.' My brother, my cousins – no one else was like that; it was just me. I always wanted to stand out. I started designing in junior high school. I wanted to fit in as the popular kid, but I always liked standing out, too. Obviously people back then knew I was gay, but they weren't saying anything because I was the cool kid. At that time, I was chopping up stuff I was getting from the thrifts, cutting the leg off a pair of Girbaud jeans and turning it into a sleeve of a white Hanes T-shirt. That still feels very Luar; my DNA is still there. I was buying designer stuff, too. I was ironing for money in my building because I wanted to buy these things I was seeing on TV, and I knew my family couldn't get them for me. So, I just started ironing after my mom gave me an iron and an ironing board. I would be watching *Saved by the Bell,* and neighbours would come by to drop a bag off. During the week I was making around $600, which was crazy in that era.

To this day you still love to get dressed up – and you have a really distinctive personal style.
It all stems from my family, especially my mom. They dressed up for themselves and not for anyone else. So, I really feel that I dress for myself, to be a conversation piece, to make people uncomfortable when they are around

'The sense of survival pushed you to seek things out. Even in terms of clothing, there was the challenge of trying to look good in a shitty dump.'

'Instead of doing drugs, like any typical teenage rebellion, I'd sneak into the FIT library to gain knowledge. That was like spitting in their faces.'

me. It's a way of not saying something, yet saying something.

How would you describe your personal style now?
Premium trash.

You describe yourself as a 'granny' a lot of the time, which really seems your thing. What do you mean by granny?
It's a state of mind; it's about how you carry yourself. Being a granny has nothing to do with age. A granny just wants to chill, have dinner, look cute, and hang out with people. It doesn't mean you're 60 or 70 years old, which I think is what a lot of people think granny means. Nowadays, kids come to me, talk to me, and ask me questions. Even older heads come to me to ask me things – and vice versa. This is why I got deemed to be a granny, which is a thing in ballroom culture, because a lot of people keep asking me questions for whatever the reason is.

Is a granny a trendsetter?
Period.

After high school, you met Shayne Oliver and co-founded Hood By Air. How did that happen?
A lot of people in high school were asking me to make stuff for them. Then, when I was introduced to ballroom and Christopher Street, I saw people making their own things in ways that made me think, 'Damn, this is fab'. When I met Shayne, he was on the same wavelength as myself, and we clicked because we came from the same upbringing. We were both searching for another status quo and looking for ways to revolutionize and shake things up. Because Shayne also dresses to make people uncomfortable. At the time, my life was about going to ballroom and seeing people put on these amazing looks, and then I met Shayne, who wanted to do the same thing as me. We became really close, and so we were like, 'We should just do our own thing.'

Tell me a bit about Christopher Street and ballroom back then? What role did that play in your life?
My entry into the scene was more about me trying to find a way to escape. I first saw Christopher Street when I used to come down the Westside Highway from my grandmother's house in the Bronx to go back to Brooklyn. There was a stop light between Christopher Street and West Street that was literally right at the entrance of the pier, where I would see all the drag and trans girls and butch queen boys, walking and going across the street. I was like, 'What the hell is this?' Then, I started talking to this dude on AOL chatrooms and they told me about it. So, I went down there and that's how I discovered Christopher Street. That's where I found a lot of my friends who are still my friends to this day. That's where I met Shayne – he was like 13, and I was 15. That's how I found ballroom. These are the families you chose. They help you out and it's fun. Obviously you fight and do the whole thing, too. Ballroom really moulded me – from the way I carry myself, to the way I look, to the way I always have to look good, smell good. You always have to come through to shut it down everywhere I go. Ballroom really be moulding the girls into this type of mindset.

You left Hood by Air in 2010. What did you take away from your time there?
Hood By Air was a stepping stone; it was a revolutionary thing where we both were building this beautiful, tangible, realistic story into fruition. It taught me a lot about construction, actual fashion things I never got to learn in school. That also meant interning for myself. In this sense, I think Hood By Air taught me to do a lot of things that I still do to this day. For example, it helped me develop my own style, and to find my own voice.

You don't come from a traditional fashion background, by that I mean institutions like Parsons or Fashion Institute of Technology. Has your unconventional route into the industry ever been the cause of any anxiety?
No, because I am from here. For me, my inspiration doesn't always come from books – it comes from what the everyday person wears. I didn't need someone to tell me what to do and how to do it. That's what the library is for. I need something hands-on; I need tangible; I need to be in it. That is why I was sneaking into the library at FIT.

After you left Hood by Air, I read that you went to the Dominican Republic to reconnect with your culture. That led to the inception of Luar. Can you tell me about that?
I was thinking about the ways in which I could give back to the people who had influenced my life. The trip was also a study of questions like: 'Why do I act like this? Why do I dress like this? Why are my mannerisms like this? Why do I talk like this? Why do I carry myself like this?' It was almost like a case study because although I come from a Dominican family, I was born and raised in New York, and I wanted to see how actual Dominicans lived. I wanted to understand the reasons – other than just money – as to why they leave their homes to come here. I wanted to see how these people who don't come from spoon-fed families survive and dress themselves for everyday purposes and events. And also, I wanted to start working with Dominican tailors because there are really amazing ones there, and I just wanted to give back. I wanted to give people an opportunity just like they gave me an opportunity.

What did you learn from that experience?
Oh my God, I learned a lot. It was great. It was amazing to see how they make outfits from nothing. The men wear women's garments and bags – like Lil Uzi Vert who has been on that wave. Even when the girls come down they are like, 'Oh, I get it.' I am like, 'Yes, they are always ahead.' For some weird reason, their style and the way they make things are always so progressively ahead of America. The whole fluid look, for example. Girl, they have been on that!

You came back from that trip, and launched your own namesake label, Luar Zepol. You've said in the past that that was at times a real struggle, especially when it came to keeping the business afloat – eventually leading you to burn out in 2019.
I was funding myself with unemployment checks, and I was like, 'OK, now I need to do my thing and figure out how I can share my story.' I was starting from scratch again, and trying to figure out how to step away from the shadow of Hood By Air and be recognized for my own thing and my own brand. To me, that was the biggest struggle for a while, figuring out my own identity and style within this space. I was doing a lot of studying, visiting a lot of libraries, and going to these neighbourhoods in the Dominican Republic where I was recording what people were wearing with my mind. A lot of the looks in the early stages of my collection resemble the boys and the girls in DR. As a young designer, you think you know it all, you can be an artist, you can do whatever you want to do – but how do you make yourself sustainable? I wasn't always in the right headspace. I was thinking about doing shows and making clothes to prove to people that I was a designer, but I wasn't thinking about how I could make money off my work. I was so stuck on this hamster wheel of fashion that, once I jumped off, I was so mentally exhausted that I needed to take a break and get myself together.

You then put the brand on pause that same year.
Yeah, and I told myself that if I ever wanted to come back, I needed to do it right. I was in such a dark place for so long. I couldn't relish all my accomplishments, even though people were recognizing me, like, 'Oh, he did a show and some press.' Once I took a break and got myself together both mentally, physically and emotionally, you could tell through the collections that I was in a happier place. These stories really mean things to me because they strike these chords about who I am today.

Where do you draw inspiration from?
Oh, I love the street; I love people-watching; I love what people think is really ugly. I am like a chameleon; one day I can look super masc and then another I'll be super femme. Or both depending on whatever I wake up to find on my floor. I'm intrigued by people who dress themselves through necessity and not out of habit. When I see, even in the Dominican Republic, people who want to emulate certain looks, they actually are doing it from thrifts, taking the fabrics to a tailor to mimic what they've seen and liked. It is all out of necessity. People come from poverty, and so it's not about the label, but rather about how you look and how you present yourself.

You mentioned ballroom earlier, too.
Me showing my collections is linked to ballroom where there is this obsession with putting together a whole production and a show to get your prize. That has been embedded in me because I love to put on a show – I am old school with things like that. Other people are like, 'Oh, I want to have a [static] presentation.' And I am like, 'I can never do a presentation like that; I would rather not show.' I love the accessories, the hair, the make-up, the whole thing – bringing people together in a space and

'I was cutting the leg off a pair of Girbaud jeans and turning it into a sleeve of a white Hanes T-shirt. That still feels very Luar. It's my DNA.'

'Luar is a reflection of myself, and these clothes are stories that I am bringing into fruition for people to experience and interpret in their own way.'

hanging out. The same thing goes with ballroom where you hang out and see people you haven't seen for a long time while watching these performances. That is how my show is.

What is the value of fashion to you? There has been a lot of struggle on your journey so far. What has kept you motivated to do this work?
It's the only way I can be. I would go crazy otherwise, I need some kind of outlet. Some people use a journal, a diary, voice memos – I have to make clothes. This is the only way I know how to express myself and let my story be told. These clothes are just like pages in my journal. Each garment has a specific meaning and is part of this chapter in my life. Luar is just a reflection of myself, and these are stories that I am bringing into fruition for people to experience and interpret in their own way.

What has been a transcendent moment for you so far?
What makes me really feel like a designer is right after the show when I see my work coming to fruition from sketches and drapes. That is when I feel my most authentic self. Even though I am drained and dead, it's like when you are writing a book and then boom you are done, and you close it, and you're like, 'finally' – but then everyone else reads it and you know they love it. That to me is the moment right after the show.

Are you optimistic about the future of Luar?
I know it's going to be good because I feel I have now learned more about the business side of running the brand. I've also learned how to manage myself and my mental health while balancing my work life and my personal life as opposed to separating the two, which I think people try to do and which is just a shit show.

As a young designer, you have had no shortage of press opportunities. There is a lot of interest in the brand, and the Ana bag is a really great example of you taking Luar to the next level of commercial success. But what are the biggest obstacles facing you?
Yes, 100%, that is the only way you can continue sharing your stories and your art. Figuring out what pieces are commercially successful is what allows me to keep selling my story. I know what I want to do. I am an accessories person: I love accessories and I think building this whole empire around accessories is what will help me tell my story and create my collections. As a young designer you really want to run the show and wear every hat. You want to do everything yourself because you are scared that your name will end up crucified if things go wrong. So, the biggest challenge is learning how to take your hat off and let other people wear it as well. Then, just trust the process. I feel like you have to sift through a lot of people to find the right ones who are ready to ride or die for you. This is the same with all creators and designers and artists; we are scared of letting people do things for us. But I find that it's once you learn to let things go a bit that you really start growing.

I have one last question: who are your muses?
My mom, 100%. There is also this one woman who probably lives on the street and who I always see walking around the city.

Who is she?
I don't know, but she just dresses like she has the *best* style.

1. First released in 1984, Diego Echeverria's time-capsule documentary *Los Sures* is a complex portrait of the community living in the south side of Williamsburg, then a mainly Puerto Rican and Dominican neighbourhood and one of New York City's poorest. The Brooklyn Academy of Music described the film as, 'Both an invaluable record of pre-gentrification Brooklyn and an ode to a community's resilience.'

‘I love this one!’

Hermès Spring/Summer 2023 accessories, as chosen by ten of our favourite stylists.

Photographs by Charles Negre

Marc Goehring

Calfskin clog

'A clog is just the coolest shoe you can wear. When it happens to be a Hermès clog, you are not only the coolest, you are also the chicest!'

Katie Burnett

Kelly II en désordre in box calfskin

'I am always drawn to classic silhouettes that offer something irregular and allow a new perspective. The design of this bag gives you something unexpected in such an unpretentious and effortless way.'

Beat Bolliger

Haut à courroies Rock bag in Evergrain calfskin

'Just the perfect bag for travel with its detachable flat pocket connected to a keychain.'

Patti Wilson

Bolide 1923 Casaque bag in Togo and Evercolor calfskin

'This really is the ideal bag shape. I could fit a good bit in it, so that is perfect for me when I'm working. It doesn't hurt that the punch of bright yellow gives it a cool tough aesthetic – "X" marks the spot!'

Audrey Hu

'Mon premier galop' shawl in cashmere and silk

'The playfulness of the print brings out childhood memories and my inner child.'

Ellie Grace Cumming

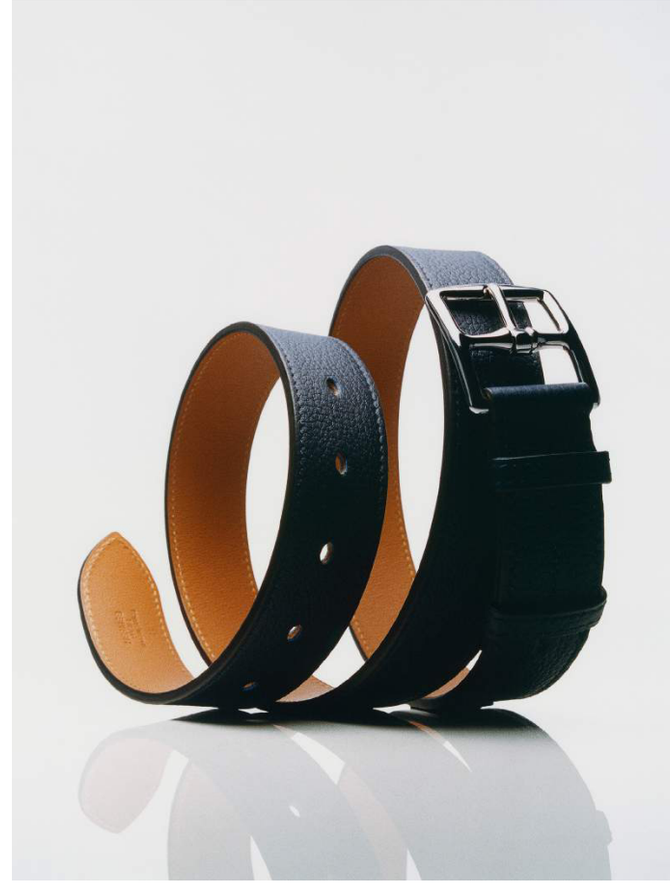
Kelly II Sellier bag in Barénia calfskin

'My signature colour has always been black.
The Hermès Kelly is the epitome of elegance and the ultimate luxury.
If you have one, then you need no other bag.'

Carlyne Cerf de Dudzeele

Birkin bag in Barénia calfskin

'Because it's the chicest bag in the world.'



Mel Ottenberg

Belt in Togo calfskin

'I wear the black version of this belt every day; it's perfect. Now I need this night-blue one. My life will be so much better once I have it!'

Haley Wollens

Calfskin boots

'These are the type of boots you can wear through a lifetime, then pass them onto someone from the next generation, worn down and loved, eternally classic and cool.'

Aleksandra Woroniecka

Belt in Taurillon calfskin

'A little touch of chic around the waist makes me feel sexy.'

‘It always felt like an exciting school trip.’

For 11 seasons, Dennis Freedman and Juergen Teller took Barneys’ catalogues out on the road.

Interview by Thomas Lenthal
Photographs and layout by Juergen Teller

MEAT LINE
HALAL BUTCHERS
LEASE FOR SALE
24
HIGH STREET
HARLESDEN

LEMON
5.99

Balmain leather moto boot, $1190. (right) **Ann Demeulemeester** suede center-zip boot, $1605.

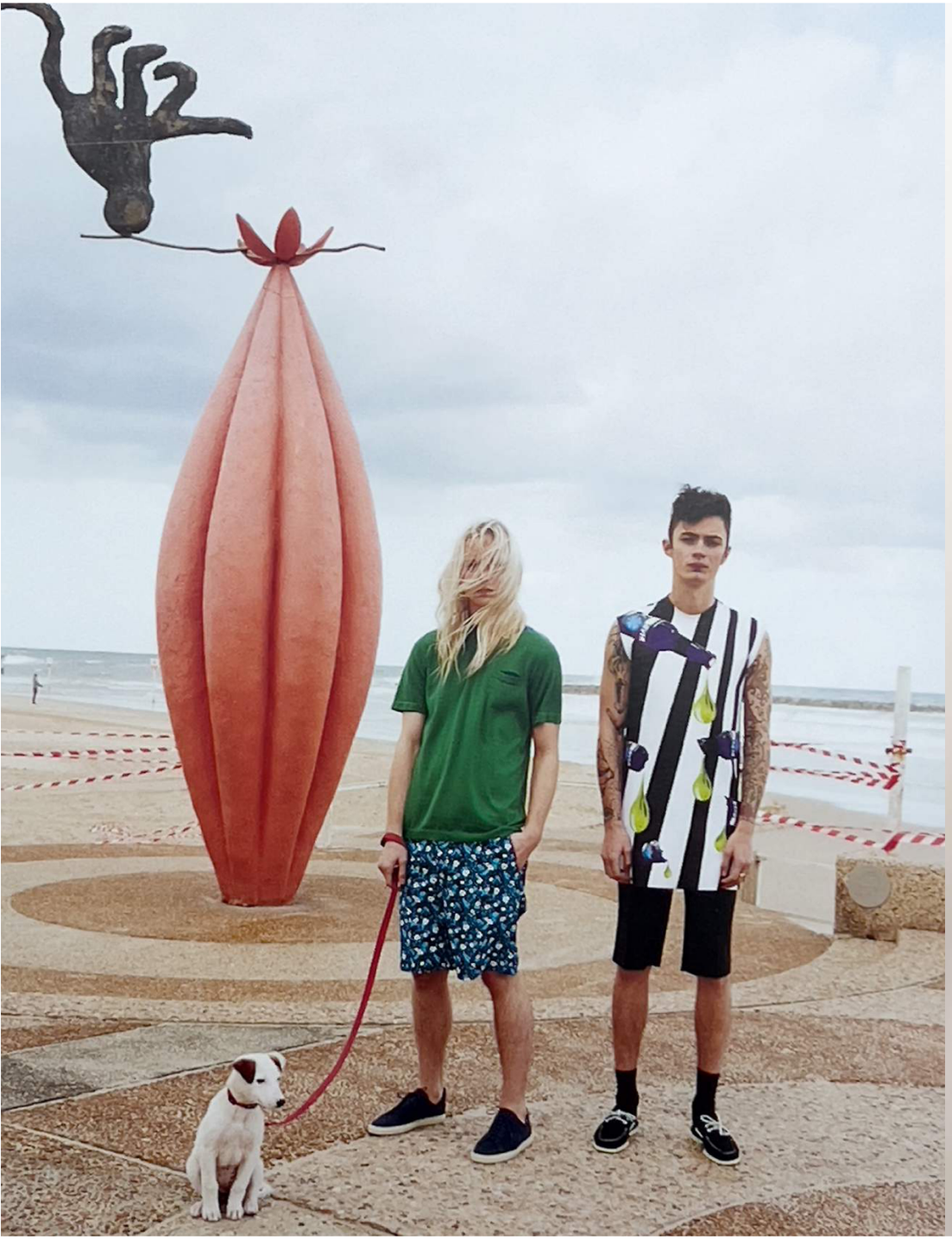
BARNEYS
NEW YORK

HOTEL CENTRAL
Parkplätze

N VX 850

BARNEYS
NEW YORK

(FROM LEFT) **YANG LI** viscose bomber jacket with fur collar, $2995, mohair and silk turtleneck, $680, and wool trousers, $985. **SIKI IM** wool overcoat with removable fur collar, $2650, wool and cotton turtleneck, $625, and wool and cotton trousers, $700. **CROCKETT & JONES** black leather ankle wrap boots, $850.



PALERMO BY JUERGEN TELLER
BARNEYS
NEW YORK

BARNEYS.COM

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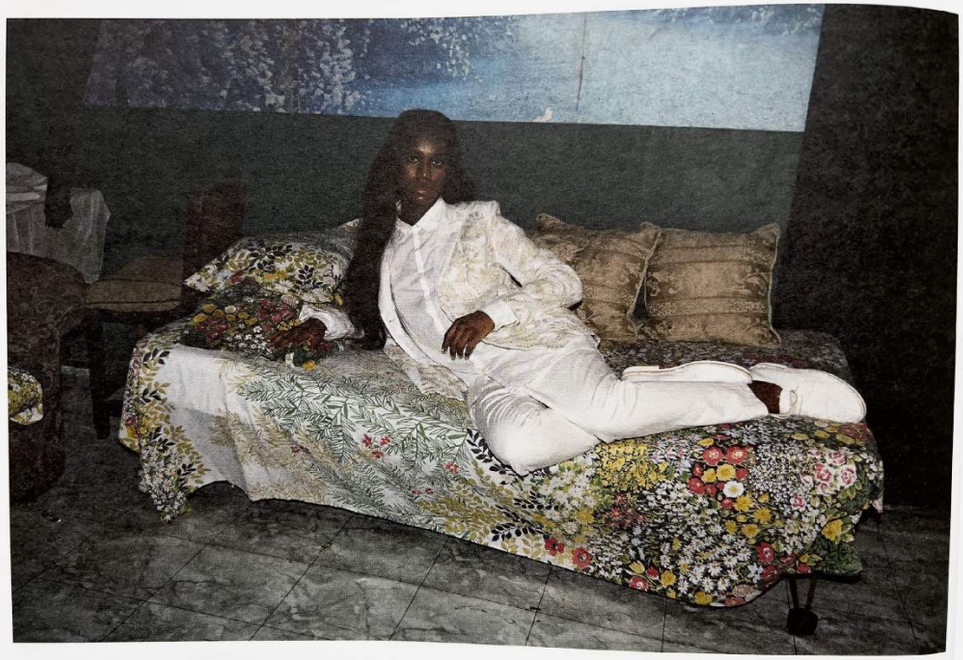
LANVIN wool hopsack sport jacket, $3090, cotton voile shirt, $570, wool hopsack trousers, $620, and leather and rubber sneakers, $760

MAISON MARTIN MARGIELA cashmere overcoat, $3280, calfskin vest, $1550, cotton jersey pullover, $420, wool trousers, $760, and leather laceless balmacaan, $690

THOM BROWNE *wool herringbone overcoat, $3340, wool herringbone sport jacket, $3015, cotton oxford shirt, $240, and wool herringbone cuffed trousers, $2035.*

(FROM LEFT) LOEWE suede trench coat, $7390, and cotton trousers, $850. LOEWE [illegible] trousers, $990.



HOTEL
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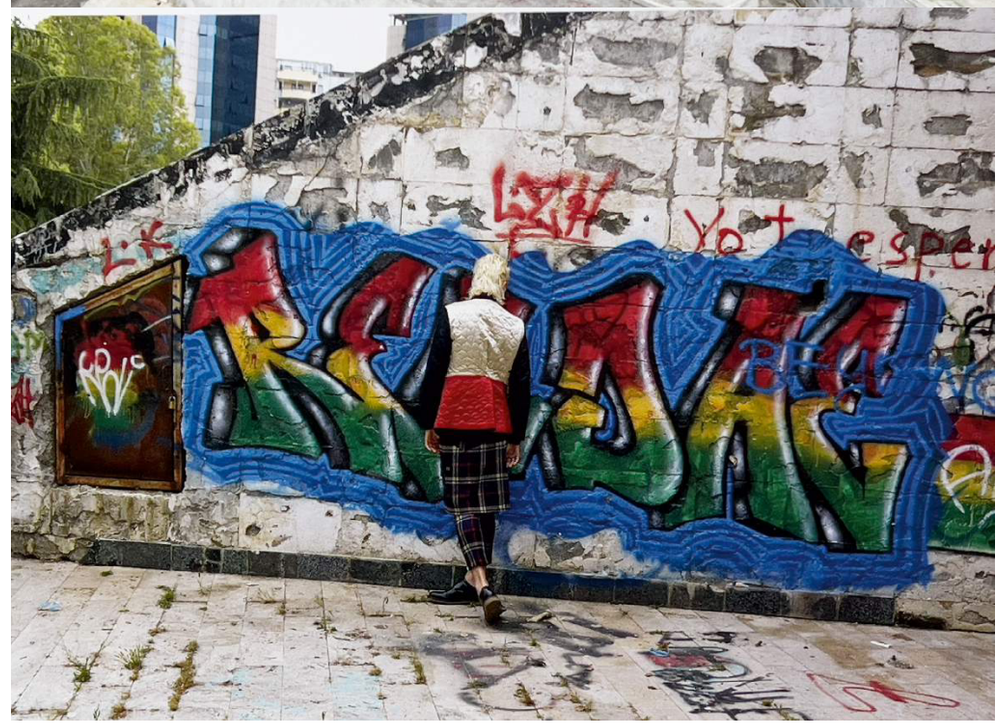

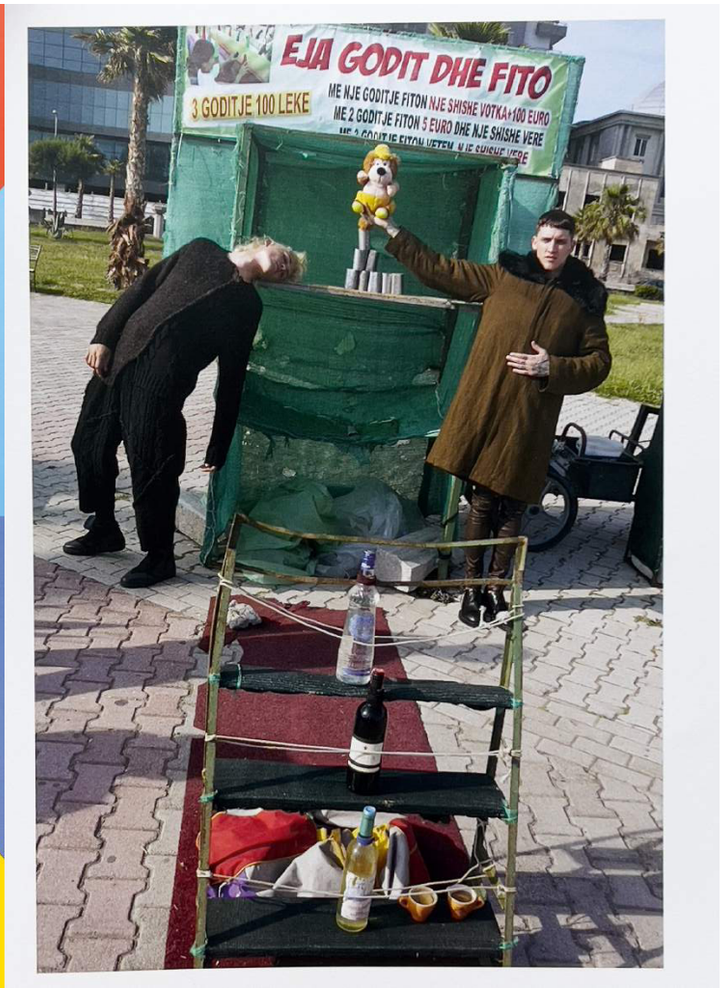
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BARNEYS
NEWYORK

Photographed at El Tucán.

Jennifer Rubell *Devotion*, 2016. Photographed at the Rubell Family Collection.

ROAD

CLOSING
LAST
DAYS
DOWN
SALE
SALE
DOWN
CLOSING

Back in 1998, *W* magazine's creative director Dennis Freedman put a call through to Juergen Teller. Freedman was keen for the London-based German photographer to join his roster of go-to contributors, as he continued to carve out the monthly title's unique place in the increasingly crowded, cut-throat and (then) commercially robust world of American fashion print media. As Freedman saw it, photography was a profoundly artistic practice, something noble, meaningful, and with the capacity to transcend the longstanding clichés so abundant in the 'pages from the glossies'. In awe of colour-photography masters such as William Eggleston and Stephen Shore, as well as Robert Frank's piercing vision of America, Freedman's modus operandi was clear – put the photography firmly before the fashion. 'William Eggleston didn't style his subjects,' he says today. 'They wore what they wore and what they wore was just a part of them. The picture wasn't about that.'

On the third time of trying, Freedman successfully coaxed Teller over to New York to take a meeting at *W*'s office in the Fairchild Publications HQ on 34th Street. Initially, there was talk of shooting a big-budget fashion story in Egypt, the Seychelles or Jamaica. But Teller, observing with wide-eyed disbelief the corporate surroundings – the vast open-plan office, the individual 'greige'-coloured cubicles, the slick but soulless furniture, the fax machines battling for space with indoor plants – suggested shooting in the office itself. The resulting 30-page story, 'Editor at Large' (February 1999), featured Stephanie Seymour as the 'editor in chief', Shalom Harlow as an employee eating take-out lunch in the staff kitchen, and Naomi Campbell in reception on a casting go-see. The pictures were resolutely postmodern – a self-referential observation of the culture and nature of the fashion magazine – and were, crucially, unretouched. The shoot set the tone for a creative partnership at *W* that stretched over more than a decade, resulting in a boundary-pushing body of work that both examined and redefined the role of fashion editorial for the new millennium.

In 2011, Freedman, by then widely recognized as one of fashion's most committed creative directors, left his role at *W* to join New York retail institution Barneys. One of his first moves as creative director – a job that included overseeing everything from Barneys' corporate identity to its flagship store's window displays overlooking Madison Avenue – was to call on Teller to shoot an ongoing series of print catalogues, initially featuring the store's seasonal mix of men's fashion (womenswear was added in the third season). The pair set themselves a creative brief that today seems almost utopian in its simplicity: where shall we go to shoot? The answer was culturally and geographically light years from fashion's traditional backdrops of Paris, New York and LA, and became emblematic of the duo's adventurous, unpretentious and idiosyncratic approach. Over the following six years they would shoot in Panama City, Tirana, Frankfurt, Palermo, Tel Aviv, New Orleans, Belgrade, Athens and West London ('on the wrong side of the Harrow Road,' says Teller), as well as heading to the Cannes Film Festival and Miami Art Basel without so much as an invite or accreditation to their names. Once on location, the shoots adopted a production ethos loosely defined by Freedman as, 'Let's go out and see – and shoot – what we find.'

Assembled and viewed today, the collective work shines a light on a time in recent fashion history – on the cusp of the social-media revolution – that feels as freewheeling as it does sophisticated, innocent, nostalgic even. Today's all-prevailing digital culture of hashtags, algorithms and the infinite scroll had yet to sideswipe and reformulate so much of fashion photography. Even rampant celebrity culture is given relatively short shrift. The only hint is a low-key, seemingly random appearance of Almodóvar regular Rossy de Palma, poking her head out of a length of industrial concrete piping on a Miami construction site, a Balenciaga combat boot perched on her head. (The reason for her appearance? 'We just bumped into her in the hotel lobby,' says Teller.)

Produced between 2011 and 2016, the Barneys seasonal catalogues were subject to limited distribution – principally to loyal US-based customers and the brands featured within its pages – and precious little advertising placement ('maybe once or twice in *Artforum*,' recalls Freedman) or digital hype. This seemingly under-the-radar presence has since made them some of the most coveted fashion ephemera of recent times, while also coming to symbolize the end of an era in American fashion. What happened next has been assigned to the annals of modern fashion history (or rather, tragedy). Freedman was let go from his role in 2017, following the departure of Mark Lee, the CEO who had hired him. Within three years, Barneys had fallen into bankruptcy and closed its doors forever.

Keen to explore this seminal yet often overlooked body of work, *System* spoke to Dennis Freedman and Juergen Teller about the liberating nature of having to shoot head-to-toe grey suits, and why their Barneys catalogues continue to represent an antidote to the endless flow of 'painstakingly boring and overproduced' commercial fashion imagery.

Thomas Lenthal: Prior to shooting for Barneys, the two of you had established a longstanding working relationship that had yielded some exceptional editorial stories for *W* magazine. Did the pair of you have any discussions about how the commercial environment of shooting for Barneys might impact this?

Dennis Freedman: I've never really considered there to be any significant difference between editorial, or for the lack of a better word, commercial work – I see it all as photography. Of course, there's always been the sense that advertising is much more conservative and product driven in a way that, for me, generally lacks any real creative ambition. In this instance, it didn't make *any* difference. The real challenge was: what can Juergen and I do after working together for 10 years in what's been a kind of series? Because the stories we'd done at *W* were basically all rolled out one after the other.

Juergen, what was your perception of Barneys prior to Dennis calling you about shooting the catalogues?

Juergen Teller: I had heard of Barneys, of course, and I'm sure I had stepped inside Barneys before I worked with Dennis on this, so I knew that it was a pretty progressive and interesting department store. We had such a strong friendship and working relationship – as Dennis says, over 10, 12 years with *W* – and it was something I was looking forward to exploring in other areas, so when Dennis mentioned Barneys, I didn't have to think about it too much.

Dennis, were you given more or less carte blanche to create work that you felt would be successful in expressing what made Barneys unique?

Dennis: I have been unbelievably lucky in my professional life, because my first editor was Patrick McCarthy[1] [at *W*] who absolutely, 100% trusted me, to the point where he never even knew where I was. I don't mean that facetiously; I could have been in China and he wouldn't have known. And then [Barneys CEO] Mark Lee[2] hired me; he certainly knew what he was getting with me. It wasn't like, 'OK, can you now be a different creative director?' Mark understood that this was a legendary brand, and he was committed to creating something extraordinary; he wanted to create his own imprint and we both felt by doing campaigns like this, it would differentiate us from our competition, which was essentially Bergdorf Goodman. It took someone like Mark, a visionary, to achieve this, and certainly to allow me the trust to work.

What was the starting point for this work? Can you recall the earliest conversation you had about it?

Dennis: After several conversations, Juergen and I came up with the idea of 'where are we going to shoot?' We were very careful about where we went. We didn't just say, 'OK, here's a pin on the map'; there was always a reason, and the reason was based on a mutual feeling. Part of the idea was to shoot in locations that were transitional spaces; in other words, if you were going somewhere else, you would do a stopover in Frankfurt. Although we ended up in Albania for a whole different reason [laughs], which probably says a lot about the overall nature of the work we were doing.

Juergen: It was very important that we didn't go to New York, LA, or Paris. Similarly, we thought, let's not go to Berlin, where everyone else is going; let's go to Frankfurt instead. So we picked these more exotic locations and we really dived into the local scenes there. We got to see inside doors that were opened for us; it was really exciting.

Dennis: It's telling that Juergen uses the word 'exotic', because what I find interesting is the extraordinary in the ordinary. I mean, if you go to Frankfurt you're not necessarily expecting exotic, but the reality is that in that kind of 'unspectacular' city, you can find so many strange and wonderful things. We found that in every place we went; it wasn't like we went somewhere knowing that we'd find spectacular interiors.

Juergen: One of the main things was that we always worked with the same team: Dennis, Emanuele [Mascioni],

'It was crucial that we didn't go to New York, LA, or Paris. We thought, let's not go to Berlin, where everyone goes; let's go to Frankfurt instead.'

Once on location, the Barneys shoots adopted a production ethos loosely defined by Freedman as, 'Let's go out and see – and shoot – what we find.'

who did a brilliant job on production and scouting the locations, the same stylist, Poppy Kain, and mostly, the same hairdresser, Syd Hayes. So every six months we all went on what felt like an exciting school trip, a shared adventure.

So there *was* a framework, but the framework was 'adventure'.
Dennis: What I've always found really satisfying is that Juergen and I are very much inspired by, for want of a better word, *mistakes*. By things going wrong. By being under pressure and not having all this time. It's what animates our work.
Juergen: Also, when we set certain things up – and this is really important – it was so loose and so neither of us was afraid to miss the point. There was such an openness to trying things and not being afraid. That's what made it so exciting, because the things we dreamed up turned out to be extraordinary. We just made the most of any situation; we helped catapult each other to make better work.
Dennis: Juergen's right. We never knew how it was going to turn out, and that's what made it exciting. Do you remember, Juergen, in Belgrade when we hired a local hairdresser? We didn't even know who he was, it didn't matter; all we knew was that he had a hair salon. It was something that I often think about. I mean, how many brands would just be like, 'OK, we're going to Belgrade and we'll get someone local to do the hair'? But that was the success of the project. Because the local hairdresser guy brought something different to the whole dynamic.

Did you cast people locally as well?
Juergen: No, not really. There is a great casting agency in Düsseldorf called Tomorrow Is Another Day. The main person there [Eva Gödel] has a great eye for different kinds of interesting looking people. Balenciaga now uses them. So we used this agency, and we always did the casting beforehand. It would have been too difficult to manage that on location, on top of everything else, because we had so much to photograph.

Let's talk about the clothes for a moment. Was there clear direction from Barneys of what needed to be shot?
Juergen: For Barneys and for Dennis, it was very important to always have the clothes photographed from head to toe. Even for advertising, I can just do a head shot, or certain crops, and it works really well, but this was each designer's look from head to toe: Yohji Yamamoto from head to toe; Armani from head to toe… Initially, that created a question mark for me, but also a challenge. We used it to our advantage, because by shooting head to toe you're able to see more of the location and the surroundings. What I saw at first as a hindrance became one of the best things about these shoots, I think.
Dennis: And it wasn't just Yohji Yamamoto; it was also brands like Zegna – with clothes that could not have been more conventional. You'd look at the first spread in the catalogue and it's a grey suit! I've thought about this and I see these images as being a bit of a precursor to this maximalist aesthetic; we were shooting conventional clothes in these maximalist ways. So the contrast between the simple grey suit and this kind of bizarre setting in an often rather ordinary location, was really interesting. We were clashing two cultures, and that gave it something more discordant.

Playfulness had long been an integral part of Barneys' DNA. Was this on your mind when you began the shoots?
Dennis: One thing I can say – and this is why I think I always, always had such a rewarding experience – is that for Juergen, there is a very thin line between this maximalist approach and something kind of obvious or even camp. Juergen can walk that line. Not that we didn't fall off once in a while, but it was never cheap and was always subtle. That might be a weird word to use, but I believe that…
Juergen: It's true.
Dennis: I'm not making a value judgement on any photographers who have been influenced by Juergen, however, it is so obvious to me where those differences occur, like the subtleties of where someone is placing their hand. It was hopefully ambiguous, too, and so I never worried about working with Juergen because if you have that, you know when it crosses the line and he would say, 'No, no, no, that's not good.'

Today, even with editorial assignments, you can seldom go to a place with so few preconceived ideas or maybe none at all, and say, 'We'll take it from here', and then just really embrace the reality of what is around and be open to anything because you really are not expecting anything.

'Why are campaigns so painstakingly boring? And overproduced – which is even worse! I might get into trouble for saying this, but who cares?'

Dennis: That was the idea. New Orleans, for example, was a really interesting choice. It is a city unlike any other in America. It has a prominent community of vampires and witches, and I am not being glib about that; it is real. We had someone extraordinary helping us who really knew the underbelly of that city and I remember ending up at a genuine witch's house. Then you have the Bayou, which is one of the strangest places in America. New Orleans gave us something that you will never find elsewhere in the United States or anywhere else because of the African-American, Spanish, Creole culture there. And all that came about because we were open to anything.
Juergen: I mean, we went to Panama – I'd never thought I'd go there!
Dennis: There was the canal, which we learned a lot about. This project came with a lot of learning, too; it was about getting outside the golden carriage that many of us exist in within fashion. It is hard to turn away a golden carriage, but sometimes you need to get out. One thing I'd forgotten about until I was looking through your layouts for this story was that, in the middle of Panama there was this huge head of Albert Einstein![3] All of a sudden, Albert Einstein is popping up out of the grass. I have no idea why it was there. Then that time we were in Athens, and we went to a gallery and one of the wall pieces was called *Let's Get Rich*…
Juergen: No, it was *Let's Make Lots of Money*…[4]
Dennis: That's right. Athens was going through its worst economic crisis at the time and we had actually delayed our trip for six months. Just before we had initially planned to go I called Dakis Joannou[5] and asked him if he felt it was appropriate for us to come at this time and take photographs of clothes? And he said, 'I don't think you should come right now.' And then six months later, he said, 'I think you should come now; I think it's time and we need this.' Then, on the wall there were those words 'let's make lots of money' and that picture of the guy in his black suit sitting there. It just said everything. You cannot scout these things; you just can't. You are going to find them if you know where to look – that is the secret.

How did Albania come up as a location?
Dennis: Emanuele called Juergen from the airport in Tirana and he said, 'There is a hotel across the road, an airport hotel, and it is called Hotel Jurgen!'[6] That was all we had to go on; we didn't know anything else. Juergen called me and we said, 'Oh my god, let's go!' We knew that there had to be many interesting places. Albania was like North Korea for many years and had been shut off from everywhere.[7] It was just beginning to open up, and I was so excited to get there. We were completely inspired.
Juergen: People in all these places were very open and curious, and never cynical. In general, whenever I shoot in Italy, things are possible; France is more difficult; in America, you need permits for everything; and London is getting increasingly difficult. All these other places welcomed us with open arms.
Dennis: Going to Albania was really special because I am pretty sure this was the first big commercial fashion shoot that had taken place there. For us, it was the idea of seeing a country that was emerging; you could see and feel the beginning of, for the lack of a better word, a democracy, and we were witness to that changeover. Being in the business that we were in is more than just work, it is life, and a privilege to be going around the world. Believe me I know how lucky I am.

To what extent did you have local producers or contacts, or was it more a question of arriving and seeing what to do?
Juergen: We always had contacts and it was always pretty well researched. Of course, we didn't know *exactly* what, but we had the guidance of people on the ground who we could trust. It wasn't totally blind. It was well thought through and curated, yet completely open.
Dennis: Juergen, we have to mention the two places where we were *not* invited. We went to the Cannes Film Festival even though we had no official accreditations. We couldn't go in anywhere, but we did these crazy photographs on the fringes of everything…
Juergen: It was way more exciting than being there officially!
Dennis: And we went to Art Basel in Miami. Same thing – no passes, no accreditations, and we just did everything on the fringe. There is that great photo of the two bodybuilders holding the pocket bags. That could not have happened had we been part of the establishment. It was a way of saying, 'You know this whole hierarchy of art fairs, previews and special previews? We'd rather go uninvited…' And I'll just put this in and then shut up: a

'What I always find satisfying is that Juergen and I are very much inspired by, for want of a better word, *mistakes*. It's what animates our work.'

fashion shoot isn't just about the exercise of shooting clothes. It is, in a sense, a family: we go to dinner, we talk and we might have a drink, and it forms a real connection that is absolutely reflected in the pictures.
Juergen: I totally agree. We talk over dinner, we have an idea about something, and then we might see something and go do a picture at 11.30 at night.

As you say, that's often reflected in the pictures.
Juergen: When you asked before about the direction from Barneys, the other interesting thing was that we had to shoot still lifes, like a pair of shoes or some handbags. It can be the most boring thing, but Dennis was so brilliant. We work so well together that we even got excited making those pictures.

but overproduced – which is even worse! I know I might get into trouble for saying this, but at this point, who cares?

How many catalogues did you end up doing together for Barneys?
Juergen: We did 11 in total.
Dennis: We did it for six years.

Was it already clear from the start what the end goal would be for these pictures? Was it all about the print catalogue? Who was that destined for, like, was it being mailed out to customers across the US?
Dennis: Barneys never advertised; we only made these very well-produced catalogues using the pictures. We only made a certain number and we only shipped them to our customers, so no one really saw these pictures because

supportive and loved what we did with the clothes. If you are lucky you can cut through the bureaucracy and work with people who believe in you. In this case, they did, and as Juergen said, there was this small insider distribution.

How small? Because everyone in the industry *did* see it.
Dennis: They were first of all sent to our customers and to the brands who we bought. But I don't think they were sent to Europe; it was too expensive. It was small but with a big impact because, as Juergen says, important designers got to see them.

What was the reaction internally to the catalogues? Presumably it was positive otherwise you wouldn't have made it an ongoing series.

'While every other art form was engaging with contemporary culture, fashion remained in its own parochial elitist world. That couldn't and didn't last.'

Dennis: One of the highlights of my career was, and still is, I think, that Juergen 100% trusted me to set up the still lifes on these shoots. It would take a little while as I would be playing with all the accessories, and I would go somewhere and take a bag and just put it on the floor, and 9 times out of 10, that is what we shot. It was my only period of being what you could call a stylist, but it really worked…

Looking at the Miami pictures, I can see a link between them and the windows you were doing at Barneys.
Dennis: Yes, 100%! When I think of those pictures I also think about what was, and still is, missing from so many campaigns –this kind of mad humour. Why are all these campaigns so painstakingly boring? And not only boring,

they were not widely distributed.
Juergen: From Barneys' point of view, I think these catalogues were very important for the designers themselves, and that helped Barneys' commercial buyers get the best products. Fashion designers or their PRs would all come to me and said, 'Oh my God, your Barneys catalogue is genius; every time it is so fresh.' So I think they helped Barneys in that way.

It gave Barneys fashion credibility.
Dennis: We mostly shot men's fashion and I really think the one true genius at Barneys was the menswear buyer, Jay Bell, who now happens to work for Thom Browne.[8] We're not talking men's suiting; that wasn't him. Jay, for example, was buying Off-White super early. He knew *everything*, and he was so

Dennis: Well, I'll tell another story without naming any names, but I remember one day I was at Barneys and one of the buyers – not Jay Bell – just didn't get what we were doing, like *really* didn't get it. She said to me, 'Dennis, why can't you use "pretty girls"?' I swear! I think I had an interior meltdown; it made me really depressed. This was a major buyer at Barneys, and she is asking me why we can't use 'pretty girls'. I said, 'Do you go to shows?' Of course she went to shows. 'Do you look on the runway, do you look at magazines?' I said. 'What is a "pretty girl"?' That was a culture I had to deal with at that time, even in Barneys.

I can well imagine.
Dennis: But in a weird way, there was, and still is, a little more freedom with

men's fashion. And the great growth during my time at Barneys was in men's.
Juergen: That also started when menswear became much more interesting. It made a real push.
Dennis: There were designers who were really challenging men's style codes, but there were still those who were just a white suit, a black suit, a grey suit. I knew that Juergen was not the kind of photographer who would look at a men's suit and think, 'Oh my god, how am I going to shoot that? How am I going to light it?' In fact, I've never really had that kind of thinking about shooting fashion. I would always say, 'Well, you know, William Eggleston didn't style his subjects. They wore what they wore and what they wore was just a part of them. The picture wasn't about that.' Similarly, Juergen was someone I never worried

about; he wasn't going to be like, 'Wow this is a boring brown suit', because a boring brown suit can be great for our picture.

Do you think in some way you were reacting against something wider in the industry?
Dennis: At the time, the world was so small. There was, and still is, a parochial approach in the fashion world; it's so far behind television, movies, music. Even when I was at *W,* I kept saying, 'Oh my god, fashion imagery is like living in a *Leave It to Beaver* world.'[9] While every other art form was engaging with contemporary culture, fashion was isolated in its own parochial elitist world, along with everyone in it. That couldn't and didn't last. It was never bound to last. I never accepted that, and on a personal

level, I couldn't buy into that.
Juergen: If I think of fashion photography or fashion advertising, I want it to be alive. I want you to feel a person, their smile, their sadness, their energy, that they are happy to be wearing a sexy outfit or they are cold when they wear a coat because that is why you wear a coat. Fashion, for me, should be fun – it should be light and happy, but fashion photography is so deadly serious and manufactured. It just doesn't live in real life. My thing was that I wanted to bring it into the world, like in Albania, and make it more human. For me, photography was always about these models coming to do the shoot and being able to see their skin and the colour of their hair – not some airbrushed shit with a handbag shoved in their face. It is about being alive – that is what it is.

1. Patrick McCarthy worked as a correspondent for *WWD* in Washington, London and Paris before taking over in 1993 as editorial director of the daily and its companion monthly, *W*. He transformed the latter 'into an oversize, news-driven fashion-and-lifestyle magazine stuffed with provocative fashion pages and writing that can be both journalistic and incisive', as Michael Gross put it in a 1997 profile of McCarthy. He became chairman of Fairchild Publishers, the magazines' owners, but left in 2010, and died in 2019 aged 62.

2. Mark Lee was appointed chief executive of Barneys in 2010, charged with reviving the stores' fortunes. A longtime fashion executive, having worked for Yves Saint Laurent, Giorgio Armani and Jil Sander, he appointed Dennis Freedman as the brand's creative director, and implemented a retail strategy that took the company back into profitability by 2012. He retired in 2017; Barneys filed for bankruptcy in August 2019.

3. The oversized bust of Albert Einstein made of painted artificial marble that graces Plazuela de Albert Einstein, a small plaza by two busy roads in Panama City, was inaugurated in January 1968 by then vice president Max Dell Valle. A gift from the Hebrew Community Council for Panama and the work of Panamanian sculptor and painter Carlos Arboleda, it was originally accompanied by the equation $E = mc^2$, which has since disappeared. Einstein himself only visited Panama once, on December 23, 1930, stopping on his way to San Francisco in the city of Colón. During his day in the country, he went shopping in the morning and met the president Florencia Harmodio Arosemena in the afternoon.

4. *Let's Make Lots of Money* is a work by French artist Matthieu Laurette, who says that his work 'uses various strategies to explore the relationships between conceptual art, pop art, institutional critique, economics and contemporary society'.

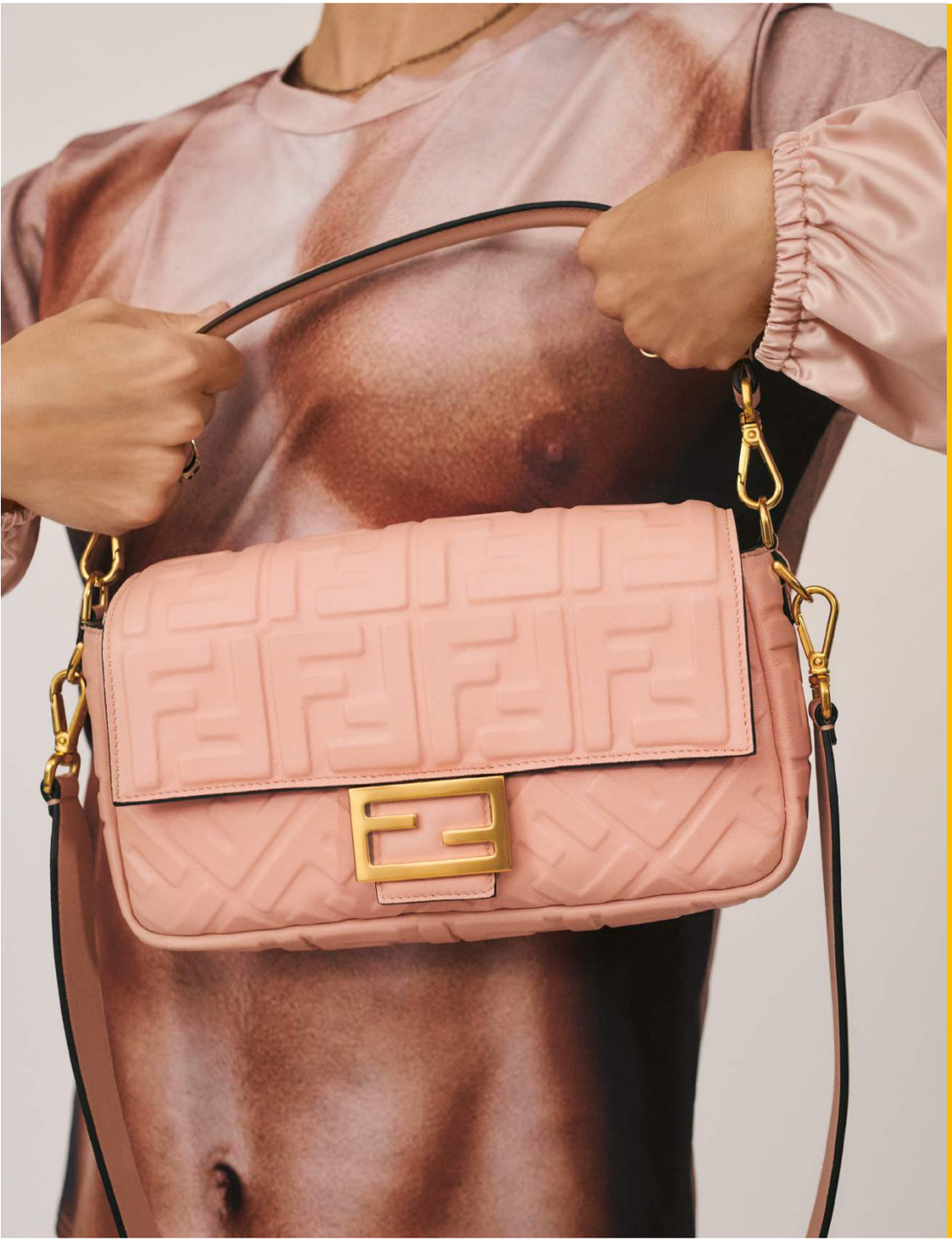
5. Dakis Joannou is a Greek-Cypriot industrialist and art collector. He founded the DESTE Foundation for Contemporary Art in 1983 as a place to show works from his collection by artists including Janine Antoni, Matthew Barney, Maurizio Cattelan, Robert Gober, Chris Ofili, and Kara Walker. Joannou owns a motor yacht called *Guilty* that features a 'razzle-dazzle' camouflage hull designed by Jeff Koons.

6. Conveniently located right next to Tirana International Airport, Hotel Jurgen charges, at time of writing, €50 for a double room. On Tripadvisor.com, the establishment has received four-star reviews (diannemaree from Auckland: 'Excellent … Couldn't ask for more for the money') to one-star maulings (Rebecca R. from Baddeckenstedt, Germany: 'I'd rather sleep in the airport on a bench than at Hotel Jurgen'). Despite its large terrace with a view of the main terminal, Hotel Jurgen's Italian restaurant left Mikedb1 from Borne, The Netherlands, disappointed: 'We were given totally different food than we ordered … we ordered red beet salad and were given pickled tomatoes.'

7. Communist Party leader Enver Hoxha ruled Albania from 1944 until his death in 1985. While economically modernizing the country during that time, Hoxha resorted to Stalinist methods to keep the citizens in check, imprisoning, exiling and executing thousands. Hoxha made alliances with Yugoslavia (1944-1948), the Soviet Union (1948-1961), and China (1961-1978), but broke off ties each time for ideological reasons, and eventually shut his country off from the world.

8. Jay Bell has been executive vice president for merchandising at Thom Browne since November 2019.

9. The sitcom *Leave It to Beaver*, which ran on CBS and ABC between 1957 and 1963, following the adventures of Theodore 'The Beaver' Cleaver, a sometimes overly curious young boy, around his suburban neighbourhood. The show's wholesome vision of family life and parenting has made its title a synonym for the almost prelapsarian innocence of the 1950s suburban American Dream.



‘It’s not a bag, it’s a Baguette!’

Interviews by Kim Hastreiter
Photographs by Collier Schorr
Styling by Katie Burnett

All clothing and accessories from the Fendi Baguette 25th Anniversary Collection

Back in 1997, Silvia Venturini Fendi, an heiress to the Fendi empire, had not long been in her role as head of accessories. Her new design was a petite shoulder bag in soft leather that nestled under the arm as easily as a French loaf: the Fendi Baguette. A light, modern and cheekily named expression of Fendi's classic luxe values – and an alternative to Prada's then-ubiquitous black nylon bags – the Baguette quickly became *the* bag to have for industry insiders and consumers alike, rocketing brand sales and proving Silvia's design instincts.

Meanwhile, on the other side of the Atlantic, New York stylist Patricia Field, who had made a local name for herself with her eponymous clothing and accessories store, was offered the role of consultant stylist and costume designer for a new TV series called *Sex and the City*, a sassy and oh-so-New York snapshot of four women's lives in the late 1990s. Field armed the show's main protagonist Carrie Bradshaw, played by Sarah Jessica Parker, with a Fendi Baguette, projecting it as the ultimate aspirational fashion accessory. Famously in season three, a mugger demanded that Carrie give him her bag. 'It's not a bag,' she replies. 'It's a Baguette.' A legend was born – and sales *exploded*.

Triggering the birth of the 'It bag' era, Fendi's value increased, in doing so accelerating its acquisition, in 2001, by LVMH. Indeed, the broader shift in the luxury sector since then towards accessories as sales drivers has resulted in an industry that according to estimates is currently generating $490 billion annual revenue.

One person observing this from afar was a young Central Saint Martins design student, Kim Jones. After graduating in 2002 and launching his namesake menswear label, London-born Jones has since risen through the designer ranks to become one of the crown princes of LVMH – initially in 2011 when Marc Jacobs placed him to oversee Louis Vuitton menswear, through to today in his parallel artistic director roles at both Dior Homme and Fendi's women's collections.

To mark the recent 25th anniversary of the Fendi Baguette, Silvia Venturini Fendi and Kim Jones were aligned: create a standalone Fendi collection that honoured New York, aided and abetted by the prince of downtown design Marc Jacobs; the emblem of uptown luxe, the LVMH-owned Tiffany's; and of course the unofficial face of the Baguette, Sarah Jessica Parker. They then staged a celebratory runway event during New York Fashion Week last September, creating a social-media-friendly love letter to the city that first gave its heart to the Fendi Baguette.

Keen to keep the Baguette's New York celebration going, *System* asked downtown legend, founder of *Paper* magazine and self-prescribed 'cultural disrupter' Kim Hastreiter to speak with Silvia Venturini Fendi, Kim Jones and Marc Jacobs, and select an idiosyncratic cast of New Yorkers to gossip about the city they call home, before inviting photographer Collier Schorr to capture them all with their choice of – what else? – Fendi Baguette.

'It's not a bag, it's a Baguette!'

Silvia Venturini Fendi

Silvia Venturini Fendi, a granddaughter of the Roman house's founders Adele and Edoardo, had only been head of accessories and co-designer of the women's line for three years when she hit gold. In 1997, Silvia changed the trajectory of the Fendi family business *and* became a legend when she designed the Baguette, the instantly iconic 'It bag'. Having always loved the Fendis and what they've done over the years, it was a pleasure to talk to Silvia about both the Baguette and New York City back in the day.

Kim Hastreiter: When did Fendi first come to New York?
Silvia Venturini Fendi: The first store to sell Fendi in New York was Henri Bendel in 1975.[1]
Kim: Bendel's was such an incredible store in those days. So many brilliant people got their start there.
Silvia: In my family there was always this story that my mother and my aunt Carla came to New York and took a hotel suite to show the collection. Bendel's didn't come to see them and the others who did come were more conservative and said that it was not for the American market. My mother and Carla thought it was impossible that these people didn't like these things and that it was because they didn't really understand the collection. So they went around looking at shops, and when they saw the Henri Bendel store on 57th Street, they loved it.
Kim: Bendel's always sold new stuff that no other store had. It was an amazing store. Did you ever hear about Henri Bendel's open call?
Silvia: No, what was it?
Kim: Well, every month, in the 1970s and 1980s, Bendel's would have an open-house day where anybody, no matter who you were or where you came from, could stand in line and bring anything they made to show the buyers. Every month all kinds of people came from far and wide to line up on the sidewalk, holding garbage bags or cardboard boxes filled with dresses, accessories, sweaters and stuff they made. You just had to wait in line and if the buyers liked what they saw they would buy it on the spot from anyone. They discovered so many amazing unique talents this way and it made their store so unique and fresh. The jewellery designer Ted Muehling[2] was discovered this way. He waited in line with a paper bag filled with the jewellery that he'd made in his Brooklyn kitchen, and they bought it all.
Silvia: This I didn't know. My mother and Carla brought their collection over to Bendel's to show, but they were told the buyer wasn't available, so they asked for an appointment with Mrs Stutz who was the president.
Kim: Geraldine Stutz was a visionary.
Silvia: So they arrived with the luggage, unloaded the furs and when Mrs Stutz saw the collection, she said, 'I want everything – and I want to give you all the windows at Christmas.' So they left all the collections there and went back with empty suitcases. That's how everything started.
Kim: That is beautiful; I love it. New York, New York!
Silvia: New York has been very important to us.
Kim: Do you remember when you first came to New York City?
Silvia: It was in the early 1980s. I decided to work instead of studying, as I was very interested in fashion. My family said, 'OK, you have to study but you can work for us during the holidays.' So I travelled with the trunk shows and we used to do one in New York every September. I also had a lot of fun, because I was 18 and 20. It was the Studio 54 moment, and I remember we were doing the fittings at Bergdorf, so I would come directly from 54 to Bergdorf in the morning dressed in my disco evening attire, with my high heels in my hand. And the security man would say, 'You went out all night!'
Kim: I worked as a sales girl in those days at [Upper East Side clothing store] Betsey Bunky Nini on Madison Avenue. I would also stay up all night going to clubs and then go straight to work, dressed insanely.
Silvia: It was part of New York; it was so exciting. I was going to The Roxy and the roller disco.
Kim: Then came the Baguette! Congratulations on 25 years of this iconic bag. Why do you think the Baguette became such an enduring success?
Silvia: I think it was a kind of alchemy, but one of the simplest reasons was that it was the right bag for the right moment. It was in 1995 or 1996 when it was all about minimalism and everything started to be very ergonomic, especially with all the new devices being invented. At that time the black nylon bag was very popular; everyone had those.

'I'd come directly from Studio 54 in the morning to do fittings at Bergdorf, still dressed in my disco evening attire, with my high heels in my hand.'

Kim: Designers were obsessed with Y2K madness. Yes, it was that big Prada black nylon moment. Plus lots of Velcro and futurism.
Silvia: Exactly, which was never really the aesthetic of Fendi. We wanted to do something that was really Fendi. Karl and the sisters were doing eclectic furs, and we wanted something new in a bag where you could have your hands free, so women could walk with their hands in their pockets like men! That's why I wanted a very short strap, so you could wear it high under your arm. And in order to fit under the arm, the bag had to be soft and be treated as if it were not a bag, but more a garment. We experimented with different fabric and materials. I consider the Baguette a manifesto of identity and individuality, because it is always the same but always different. You choose the one you like, the one that suits you and talks to you in the end.
Kim: There were feathers and there were beads. They were like art. Were they one of a kind?
Silvia: That was the idea. They were very hard to find because the variety of components made them difficult to produce. There was a scarcity, so we started doing these waiting lists.
Kim: That made people crazy to get one. What was the tipping point moment when all of a sudden, the bag became 'It'? Was it when it was featured in *Sex and the City*? Patricia Fields, who styled the show, made that happen, right?
Silvia: Yes, Patricia! We were the first to lend her clothes and she always thanks Fendi because once we did it, all the other designers followed. When I read the story, with all those women, I thought it would be so good for Fendi – it is a show celebrating women. So I said give them everything they want. That moment when Sarah Jessica Parker says, 'This is not a bag, it's a Baguette', was exactly how I felt about the bag.
Kim: Was it that TV show that named it the Baguette?
Silvia: No, it was us. We named it that because of the attitude and the way the French hold a baguette. It's like a little bag in French; it's a baguette. I learned from Karl always to have these little jokes with names.
Kim: There is a big resurgence of the Baguette these days.
Silvia: Once again, it's timing. We started to see them on the vintage market, so we understood something was going on. This Spring collection includes interpretations of it by Marc Jacobs, Kim [Jones], Sarah [Jessica Parker], and even Tiffany's. We wanted to speak about New York City, which has been so important not only for the success of the Baguette, but also the history of Fendi.
Kim: Your latest collection was a love letter to New York. You not only showed it here, but your collaboration with Marc Jacobs even extended to a little capsule collection, which was fantastic.
Silvia: When I think about New York, I think of Marc, Sarah, and Tiffany's. Growing up, if you went to New York, you went to Tiffany's. I remember when I was 14 and my mother bought me the key ring that had the key to our house on it, so I could go out at night. I still use it.
Kim: What would your perfect day be in New York City?
Silvia: I'd go to Central Park because to me, New York is Central Park. Kim and I went together today to see the roller disco and we stayed there for hours. The last time we had two or three days in New York, there was a window of three hours and we stayed for three hours in the crowd watching them dancing. I also like to walk in the streets stopping with all the crowds together at the traffic lights and then starting altogether again. There is a sense of community, a sense of belonging to a crowd – it is so different from the Italian way of life. Street fashion really started here in New York and then spread all over.
Kim: And that is where fashion comes from much of the time. America is naive in a way because it doesn't have the baggage or the history. Also, the high-low concept came from here. Like wearing a skirt from a thrift store with a Fendi bag, that's very New York.
Silvia: This is the only city where you see creativity in the street like this. It is very exciting.

1. Luxury department store Henri Bendel opened at 10 West 57th Street in 1895 and finally shut its doors 123 years later in January 2019, because its then-owner L Brands wanted 'to improve company profitability and focus on our larger brands'.

2. 'I sort of invent my own way of making things,' says Ted Muehling. A self-described 'maximalist and minimalist', he began designing jewellery in 1976. His work combines natural materials – such as horn and wood – and precious and semi-precious stones.

Kim Jones

Kim Jones is a man after my own heart. I've loved him for years from afar but had never met him until now. I just had this feeling about him because he is so connected in what he does with culture, and so am I. After our conversation about his new Fendi collection, I realized my instinct was 100% dead on. Like me, this British designer of both Fendi womenswear and couture and Dior Homme is an obsessive collector of stuff and people, with culture seeping out of everything he does. I was so excited finally to have a chat with this super-good guy.

Kim Hastreiter: Hi, Kim!
Kim Jones: Hi, Kim!
Kim H.: I guess the question to start with is why are you celebrating the Fendi Baguette with a show in New York?
Kim J.: Because the Baguette became almost like a character on *Sex and the City*, the show about New York City that everyone was obsessively watching in the late 1990s. So I thought I would go back and look at what was going on then, in 1997, and what was going on in and around New York.
Kim H.: I've always thought of you as being a great collaborator. You've worked with some of my long-time friends like the artist KAWS, Janette Beckman, Futura, and others. I've always admired and related to you even though we'd never met until today. You have a great eye and such a passion for culture and art, which is also my language. I love that you did this latest Fendi collaboration with Marc Jacobs, Tiffany's, and Sarah Jessica Parker. What makes these collaborations great for you?
Kim J.: When I thought of this New York show, I thought about how there was always the uptown and the downtown here, and the crossover where people from different backgrounds were mixing together in night clubs. That was always really exciting to me; it always seemed so cool. When we opened the big Fendi store in New York last September, I just looked out of the window, and I saw Tiffany's and obviously *Breakfast at Tiffany's* and I was like, 'Oh, the Tiffany Baguette.' So I called Alexandre [Arnault at Tiffany and Co.] and said, 'I think we should do a Tiffany Baguette bag, but make it quite like fine jewellery. Then I started thinking of downtown, and the king of downtown to me is Marc Jacobs. I really loved what Marc's been doing in his collections recently, so I just said, 'Will you design a collection for Fendi?' It's not really a collab; he has done his version of a celebration of the Baguette, and I've done mine. And then Sarah Jessica Parker did one, too, of course.
Kim H.: Are you moving the Baguette forward or just celebrating it?
Kim J.: Everything I do in fashion has a past, present and future. That is how I work. When I started working at Vuitton, which had an archive, they did an exhibition, which was all vintage bags and trunks, and I was like, 'You need to have the new ones in it, too. You need to think about what will be in this collection in 20 years.' I was looking from a curator's point of view. Sarah Jessica Parker in *Sex and the City* being held up for her Baguette was probably what made the bag iconic. But the functionality of it was very different from other bags at the time, its softness.
Kim H.: What was your impression of Fendi when you were growing up?
Kim J.: I always associated Fendi with bags because that is what I saw. I met Silvia Fendi about 12 years ago and I just thought, 'What a chic woman.' She was wearing this safari suit, at a conference. The Fendis are really like family now.
Kim H.: How old were you when you first visited New York?
Kim J.: I guess I must have been 17, I think. I stayed in a hostel near Times Square. I probably came here to go to the different clubs, and for the excitement. I just wanted to see it all. Midtown was still quite rough; there were all those porn shops and it just felt exciting. I like the rough with the smooth, otherwise cities get too Starbucks, and that's boring.
Kim H.: Which clubs did you go to?
Kim J.: Pyramid and places like that.
Kim H.: Did you ever go to Wigstock?[1]
Kim J.: No, but I would have liked to. That was just a bit before my time, but I looked at pictures of it.
Kim H.: I met Leigh Bowery at Wigstock.
Kim J.: I have a big collection of his clothes! They are held in a museum.
Kim H.: He was a mind-blower. Do you know Stephen Tashjian, aka Tabboo!?[2] He's such a great artist. I love his work.
Kim J.: I know of him, but I don't know him personally.
Kim H.: Oh, you have to meet him. Tabboo! used to do a column for us in *Paper*.
Kim J.: I used to buy *Paper* at Tower Records in London, in the imports section; I've still got them all.
Kim H.: Amazing! You know those are collectors' items now. I sold *Paper* and left the company five years ago and never looked back.
Kim J.: I have always been an obsessive collector and those magazines were how you could see what was going on.
Kim H.: What is a perfect day in New York City for you?
Kim J.: Walking around, looking at people, going to shops.
Kim H.: Where do you see the most interesting people?
Kim J.: All the roller skaters dancing to disco in Central Park on a Sunday afternoon. There's this old woman dressed up like she's an ice skater, just dancing around and smiling; it's amazing. I could just sit there for hours. Last summer we went to Washington Square Park and there was a naked person walking through.
Kim H.: Oh, I know that guy. He lived in the park naked for the entire first year of Covid. I live on Washington Square Park. It has gotten much more gnarly; it has a sort of homeless encampment in one half of it now. It's like the old New York. So your perfect day is just walking around? Anything else?
Kim J.: Galleries.
Kim H.: You collaborate with a lot of artists I see. Do you collect?
Kim J.: I've been collecting. When you go into my house there's a Bruce Nauman, which is the two TVs next to each other, which I used to go and look at in Tate Modern when I was at Central Saint Martins. I was obsessed by it, and then one came onto the market, and I got it. I've got a mix of things in my bedroom: a Picasso, a Rodin, a Gaugin, a Magritte, an Edvard Munch, paintings by Peter Doig…
Kim H.: Whoa! You weren't joking when you said you're collector! You're a man after my own heart. So you mix new and old.
Kim J.: I like paintings from the interwar period. Then I have a library, with all first editions that have all been inscribed. I've got Vita [Sackville-West]'s copy of *Orlando*, there. The library is in a house that I bought in a village called Rodmell, which I'm going to turn into a study centre, so all the books will stay there, and with the British Library and Sussex University. So people will be able to go there. I collect ceramics, too.
Kim H.: You have to think about what you are going to do with it. I am also an obsessive collector and I am dealing with this right now as I am getting old. I'm actually doing a book and a big show about it called *STUFF*.
Kim J.: My dad died a few years ago and left a complete mess with his will. So I instantly sat down and wrote my will and decided what I'd leave to the people I love. All the Bloomsbury stuff is going to the Charleston Trust[3], and my collection of Jack Kerouac – all the inscribed copies, the letters – will go to the Jack Kerouac Estate, because they are opening a museum and we did a project with them. There are these chunks of things, like that goes there and that goes there.
Kim H.: You have to document it. You also need a book.
Kim J.: Yes, I'm going to do a book: a book of paintings, a book of clothes, a book of books. They become amazing reference materials.
Kim H.: Do it! I loved meeting you, Kim, you are not disappointing me at all. You are a man after my own heart.

'Sarah Jessica Parker in *Sex and the City* being held up for her Baguette by a mugger was probably what made the bag so iconic and desirable.'

1. In spring 1984, four drag queens leaving Pyramid Club in Manhattan had an idea: create a Woodstock-inspired festival for drag performers. A year later, the first Wigstock took place in Tompkins Square Park; it continued annually for 16 extravagant years. (It was briefly revived in 2018 thanks to actor Neil Patrick Harris and his husband, David Burtka.)

2. Stephen Tashjian is a 63-year-old artist, collector of puppets, drag artist who performs as Tabboo!, inventor of the 1960s-comic-book-style font used by the band Deee-Lite, and fashion lover. 'People are always asking me, "Why are you so dressed up?", he told the *New York Times* in 2022. 'Why? Why? Because it's today.'

3. The Charleston Trust is an art foundation in the home of British painters Vanessa Bell and Duncan Grant. Both were members of the Bloomsbury group, whose other members included Virginia Woolf, Vita Sackville-West, John Maynard Keynes, and E. M. Forster. The pair, who were romantically involved, moved to the house in 1916, with her husband, Clive Bell, and Grant's lover, David Garnett.

'It's not a bag, it's a Baguette!'

Marc Jacobs

I first met Marc Jacobs in the late 1970s or early 1980s, when he was just a born-and-bred New York City kid working at a wonderful family-owned Upper West Side fashion store called Charivari. Marc has always been a bundle of energy and it's been so much fun to watch yet another talented New Yorker move from enthusiastic 20-year-old to fun tenacious young creative to internationally renowned designer to legend. This happens in New York in many different fields. It's part of the DNA of our city, I think, and I've seen my share of kids who were laser-focused, working to the bone, and eventually evolved into superstar game changers. So I was super excited to catch up with Marc and knock heads with him about his new, super-fun little capsule collection that Kim Jones asked him to design this season for Fendi. Part of the house's 25th festivities for its Baguette, it's also a celebration of New York City itself. Kim told me that he could think of no one who represented New York City better than Marc – and Marc didn't disappoint.

Kim Hastreiter: Marc! I've known you for so many years and it's incredible looking back at what you have done. It's a mind-bender. I remember your very first show somewhere in Midtown when the girls climbed on the top of coffee tables so people could see the outfits. You were a baby!

Marc Jacobs: That was at the Century Cafe,[1] with all the polka dots and the smiley faces.[2]

Kim: Yes! Now here's this wonderful little capsule collection you designed for Fendi's first New York show, which Kim Jones featured at the end of his show here. How did this happen?

Marc: Kim and I have a long history – not as long as yours and mine – but we are friends, and we are part of the same friend group, which includes our beloved Andre Walker, my dear Kate Moss, et cetera, et cetera. Also, when we were doing Marc by Marc in New York, there was a bunch of British people like Katie Hillier, Alastair McKimm, and Kim who were all part of the same friend group. I knew Kim's menswear, and a couple of years after I got the job at Vuitton, the menswear designer there was no longer doing the collections, so I thought, 'I want to hire Kim to do Vuitton men!' Of course, that changed our friendship because we became even closer. What was wonderful was that we had the same friend group and then Kim and I suddenly added this great professional relationship. Kim did an incredible job designing the menswear at Vuitton and it just became this crazy extended family and community. Now, years later, Kim is here designing Fendi, as well as Dior Homme, and he asked me one day if I'd like to do a little capsule for Fendi. At first I was a little intimidated. I think I felt a bit of fear of stepping outside my comfort zone because I have, these days, found such a nice calm and quiet place in working on my own line and doing my own thing, especially after all the craziness of my former days, and my former habits. It felt a little daunting, but Kim was just like, 'We're friends, Marc! Don't worry, we'll take care of everything; you'll be supported.'

Kim: Did he tell you this was about the Baguette?

Marc: Well, once I got over the fear of stepping out of my playground into his, Kim told me about celebrating the 25 years of the Baguette, how important New York was to them, and that they were going to show here. How Sarah Jessica Parker mentioned it on a *Sex and the City* episode and that's how it became an 'It bag'. Kim told me he thought between our friendship, my New York City roots, and how much he respects what I do, he couldn't think of anyone he'd rather have participate in this. You know, I really just trusted him and as soon as I said yes, I decided I was going to embrace it and have fun. All through the fittings in Rome, Kim always told me it was going to be so great, and everyone from the Fendi team in Rome was so excited about making something special with me for their first ever show in New York.

Kim: Fendi has always seemed to me like a big warm family business.

Marc: When I was growing up in New York, I learned so much about fashion via my grandmother. She taught me that Fendi was this revered house and had these extraordinary furs because of Karl Lagerfeld who was at Fendi then.[3] It was before he was at Chanel. To me, Fendi was legendary like Karl Lagerfeld. So when I thought about the opportunity to join Kim and Silvia Fendi, I just thought, 'This is like my dream as a kid to be a part of this historic house and legendary name.'

Kim: Kim seems to love collaboration.

Marc: He is just a wonderful person – who is also a great designer. There's also something about Kim which I've never possessed: his sense of business acumen and merchandising, which I totally respect. Kim is really great at that. When he wants to make a creative statement, he's also very aware of how to make it commercially accessible, too.

Kim: So Marc, talk about what you did for this collection.

Marc: First, I did my take on the baguette. One of the most popular bags we have at my company Marc Jacobs right now is one that says 'The Tote Bag' on it. It is a very accessible piece, so I thought, 'Let's do the Baguette with the same language.'

Kim: But you did much more than just the bag.

Marc: We did everything! I designed a whole small capsule collection, showed within the Fendi show. I did accessories, shoes, hats, the clothes, everything. I decided to start with something we've now become known for which is the Marc Jacobs monogram that just repeats in large type MarcJacobsMarcJacobsMarcJacobs. I thought, 'Let's do FendiRomaFendiRomaFendiRoma in the same way, all in one word.' We did everything in white chalk. I wanted it to be the colours of the city I see as I come along the West Side Highway where all the people and workmen on the street are dressed in grey, fluorescent yellow and silver – you know, the construction workers and the people on the street – so I felt like these are the colours of New York City to me. We took that palette and worked it into this jacquard and wove in fluorescent yellow fabric. That was then destroyed and overprinted in silver, which was then enzyme-washed so it became like this kind of a New York street feel, which is what I wanted to bring to Fendi. I wanted to do a bit of a broken-down, rough, cooler New York vibe for them because I knew they already do 'polished' so well.

Kim: You are a born-and-bred New Yorker. What is a perfect day for you in New York City?

Marc: I wake up early, have a double espresso, then I go to see some art in some galleries in Chelsea, or maybe a museum. After that I do a little bit of shopping, either at Dover Street Market or up on Madison Avenue, and in between have a delicious healthy lunch. If I'm uptown it would be at The Mark, probably, or The Carlyle, and if it were downtown it would be at The Smile or Sant Ambroeus. Then I'd probably shower, put on something fabulous, and go to see a play on Broadway, or off-Broadway. I love theatre. When my dad was alive we went to the theatre a lot. He was an agent at the William Morris Agency. To this day I get dressed up to go to the theatre. I don't wear sneakers; I wear nice clothes. I am very into the whole ritual of what it means to go to the theatre in New York. I've always revered it because I was brought up with it, and so it holds a very special place in my heart. I also kind of cry no matter what I've seen, no matter what the topic is. I cry at the end because… I have such a primitive connection to being in a room with live actors. It feels the same as what I have for fashion. I always think of fashion as if I am directing a play doing the costumes and the sets, and the lights. That's what a fashion show is for me – it's the closest thing I can get to doing a Broadway show. I love live performance more than anything. Then, I'd go to dinner, maybe at Joe Allen, and then go to bed. That would be a perfect New York day.

'I wanted to do a bit of a broken-down, rough, cooler New York vibe for this little Fendi capsule because I knew they already do 'polished' so well.'

1. In a largely positive September 1992 review, the *New York Times* described Century Cafe, which was at 132 West 43rd Street, as a 'big, resonant, casual place with a sky-blue ceiling, a hardwood floor, theatrical track lighting, long green banquettes and paper-draped tables'.

2. Marc Jacobs' first public show, Autumn/Winter 1985, at Century Cafe was inspired by Malcolm McLaren's maxim: 'Never trust a hippy.' The collection's use of smileys, Jacobs told *10* Magazine, was not, as often thought, a nod to rave: 'I don't think I had any knowledge of rave culture or knew it even existed.'

3. Karl Lagerfeld designed for Fendi from 1965 until 2019. He is credited with having created the house's double-F logo early in his tenure.

'It's not a bag, it's a Baguette!'

Indira Scott

'I make things, I make art, I model,' says Indira Scott. So much more than just a huge 'It model' and a face of Dior, she wears her New York City badge of honour with pride when she hits the streets. Sure, she was in the right place at the right time but then New York fell in love and Indira shot to stardom. Today, underneath it all, she's still a soft, yet tough and beautiful New Yorker. A chick from Jamaica, Queens, who grew up in a hippie family surrounded by tough streets, whose beauty emanates from her deep experience of the city. She seems to love both blending in and watching, *and* shining bright and leading the way in this crazy city, no matter where she goes.

Soft leather Trunk Baguette bag, hat, jacket, wool gloves, and gaiters with cotton socks.

Kim Hastreiter: Indira, have you ever lived anywhere else besides New York?
Indira Scott: No, I'm a New Yorker, born and raised in Jamaica, Queens.
Kim: Are your parents from here?
Indira: My mom is from Queens and my dad is from Harlem.
Kim: Do they still love New York?
Indira: Yes, they would never leave New York City. I tried to get them to move to California when I was younger because I thought I might want to be a Californian. They said absolutely not; they are hardcore. They fell in love in a club – it's really cute.
Kim: Where do you live now?
Indira: In the warehouse neighbourhood of Williamsburg.
Kim: Where do you feel your tribe is today?
Indira: My closest friends are from New York, which includes the people I've grown up with and those I've met since working as a model who were born and raised in New York. I just think we gravitate towards each other.
Kim: What's it like to grow up in Jamaica, Queens? Isn't that near LaGuardia airport?
Indira: Yeah, it's by the airport. I feel like in every city the neighbourhood by the airport gets overlooked. Jamaica is a very raw neighbourhood. My family was a bunch of hippies, but I grew up in the hood. It was like this extreme balance of growing up in a household full of softness and tenderness and going outside and being rough and raw with my friends. There was a lot of diversity, a lot of Caribbeans. It was complex for me growing up; my family would see things I was doing because I wanted to be respected in my neighbourhood, and they'd ask me, 'Why are you so tough?' Finding that balance of being soft and tough was really hard, but once I found it I was really grateful for my experience.
Kim: Why are New Yorkers so tough?
Indira: I think you have to be because there are a lot of times on the trains or walking home if you're not tough that's how people mess with you. In New York, people who are trouble can smell it if you are not tough, so you have to have it as armour.
Kim: New Yorkers always know what's behind them at all times.
Indira: Yeah, you have to have that awareness.
Kim: Why do New Yorkers have to work so hard?
Indira: I feel like that's because a lot of people are all trying to make their dreams happen at the same time. They come from everywhere – it's a melting pot.
Kim: It's competitive. You have to be ambitious and hard-working to succeed at your dream.
Indira: You do, but you also have to be charming and sweet, which is hard when you are focused on being tough. Like you have to take the train everywhere you are going and on the train you have to be the toughest version of yourself, and then you have to be the most charming version of yourself when you get to where you are going.
Kim: Did you learn that through your instincts?
Indira: I learned it through my street smarts, so you learn to code-switch very quickly, to be two different people.
Kim: What was your style on the street?
Indira: I always wanted to have street style, so my cool friends would think I was cool as well. I wore Jordans and my Polo and things like that. But I would also wear things that were bolder and sillier.
Kim: Why do you think New York is better than other places?
Indira: I feel like everything you need in the world is here. You can be exactly who you want to be here and can express yourself how you want to. Everyone knows that this is where dreams come true and anything you ever wanted to try you can try here and be accepted, no matter who you are. There is no city as open, beautiful, bustling and accepting as New York.
Kim: Why do certain people come here from around America? What quality do those people have who want to be here?
Indira: I think they come here because they want a chance here to start something for themselves that they couldn't do where they come from, no matter how weird, quirky, funky, bold, exciting.
Kim: How old are you?
Indira: Twenty-five.
Kim: When you were growing up how was the energy different in New York than today?
Indira: I think it is safer now. When I grew up you'd walk down the street and hear gunshots depending on where you were; now it is not so common to hear. It definitely still happens, but it's more discreet and not so often. The thing that never changes about New York is the creativity and all the people who come here for that creativity.
Kim: Can you imagine living anywhere else?
Indira: I think I will, because I want a farm. But I will probably only move to upstate New York.
Kim: There's that hippie part of you coming through. Are you an animal person?

'My family were hippies, but I grew up in the hood in Jamaica, Queens. It was this extreme balance of tenderness at home and rawness on the streets.'

Indira: Yes. I had cats growing up. My mom likes to take in every cat off the street; it is very problematic. At one point we literally had 30 cats, but I am a horse girl, and I love sheep and things. I hope to have 50 animals in upstate New York.
Kim: What is your favourite street in New York?
Indira: Merrick Boulevard in Queens. It has all the best Jamaican food on this one boulevard.
Kim: What's your favourite New York food?
Indira: Jamaican, of course. I can't choose between jerk and curry chicken right now.
Kim: What's your favourite Jamaican spot.
Indira: Husky-P. It's like a mom-and-pop shop in Queens; it's really good.
Kim: So you still know Queens?
Indira: Of course, like the back of my hand; it's in my heart. In Queens, we have beaches and parks and a lot of us would go to the beach and the park after school. It's kind of different to the rest of the hangouts in the city. We also have the stoop hang-out culture there.
Kim: Do you still have a lot of friends that you grew up with?
Indira: I do – they are my bros.
Kim: How did all this modelling business happen?
Indira: I was at school for psychology at Hunter, but I was manifesting modelling. I got cast by DNA, then a month later I got an exclusive with Dior, so I was like, 'Oh, God bless'. I got lucky.
Kim: Only in New York! What do you love about New York today?
Indira: I love that New York is an island and it is really human.
Kim: What do you hate about New York?
Indira: I hate it when people move slow in New York. As a New Yorker, I am one of those people who wants to bump you on the street if you are just standing there in the middle of the sidewalk. Please get out of the way if you don't know where you are going in New York.
Kim: What is your favourite New York music?
Indira: Trap music.
Kim: What's trap music?
Indira: It is just like really hard mumble rap.
Kim: What is your favourite New York mode of transportation.
Indira: I like to drive.
Kim: I love driving in New York. It is really fun and risky, and great to get out aggression. Lastly, who is your favourite New Yorker, living or dead?
Indira: Can I say myself? I think that is the most honest New Yorker answer.
Kim: You bet!

‘It’s not a bag, it’s a Baguette!’

Honey Balenciaga

The 21-year-old firecracker known as Honey Balenciaga (née Gonzales) was born to dance. As a gay Puerto Rican teenager growing up in the rough Hispanic neighbourhood of East New York, Brooklyn, Honey discovered her true self in high school after enrolling in a free African dance class in SoHo. While there, she also learned about the exploding vogue and competitive ballroom scene on the West Side piers, which were filled with young kids training to become ‘house members’. It inspired Honey and her art, and once she began practising freestyle there, her reputation rose like a rocket ship, opening doors to competitions, and eventually TV, brand collaborations, and performances at BAM and the Whitney. Today, her acceptance into the gay family structures of the legendary House of LaBeija and now Balenciaga seems to make her happiest.

Sequin and leather Baguette bag, blazer, and leather high-heeled clogs.

Kim Hastreiter: Where do you live?
Honey Balenciaga: I am living in Los Angeles for the moment, but I'm from New York. I was born in the Bronx and raised in East New York. I went to high school in Queens; I took the J train every day.
Kim: What was growing up in East New York like?
Honey: It was crazy and a bit chaotic. It's a mix between a lot of people but mostly very Spanish. I literally only saw Dominicans, Puerto Ricans and Indians, that's really it. I am Puerto Rican.
Kim: Why did you leave New York to go to LA two years ago?
Honey: In New York I had trouble finding out who I wanted to become, because I was so close to my blood family. I just needed the space to create and find the person I wanted to be so I could stay true to myself.
Kim: Do you drive?
Honey: No, I don't. I'm from New York!
Kim: What's your relationship like now with New York City?
Honey: New York is my home. It's where I come from. I come back to New York often to get grounded and to remind myself where I came from, because I vogue and dance, and New York is the mecca of ballroom. Coming back to see my gay family, my gay mothers, and where I come from makes me feel like myself again.
Kim: Will you ever come back to stay?
Honey: Oh yes, but I needed to be where my career will skyrocket, which is happening for me now in LA.
Kim: You are like the baby of the Balenciaga family? Who is the oldest person in the Balenciaga family?
Honey: The longest-serving member would be the founding mother, Rocco.
Kim: Tell me about being a member of this family, as well as your blood family? Are you accepted by your blood family?
Honey: At first I wasn't accepted by my blood family. It was very heavy on my father because I'm his only son, even though I don't identify as a son any more. So having that extended family who has walked the path before me helps me to walk comfortably now in my own skin. Some things you don't want to share with your blood family
Kim: Where is ballroom happening in New York today?
Honey: It's everywhere. You can see girls voguing it on the train or on the pier.
Kim: How many different houses are there now?
Honey: There are nearly 40! My new favourite house is the House of Gorgeous Gucci and also the House of Telfar.
Kim: When was the first time you watched Jennie Livingston's film *Paris Is Burning*? It's my favourite movie of all time.
Honey: Oh my God, I watched *Paris Is Burning* after taking my first vogue class, because when we learn how to vogue from the teacher, we always watch these things to learn about them. I love *Paris Is Burning* – it shows the true essence of ballroom and where it comes from.
Kim: What are the ballroom categories these days? Blow my mind with some categories.
Honey: When I first started, it was very limited but now it is more about dramatics and performance. Now we are more inclusive, so there are categories for the non-binary girls, for butch queens, femme queens, who are trans-women, and even for faces – there is pretty-boy face, masculine face, model's face, model's body. There are so many sub-categories now. Within fashion, there's high fashion, there's street fashion, there's runway fashion, there is best dressed.
Kim: What's the biggest competition with the biggest trophy?
Honey: The biggest ball in New York is usually the Latex Ball, which is every July at Pier 59. The most popular

'I was on the pier voguing and my gay mother was watching me and was like, 'You vogue so sweet, it's like honey.' When she said honey, it just clicked.'

smaller ball in New York happens every Monday at 3 Dollar Bill in Brooklyn, and it's open to all.
Kim: You are so young; you weren't even born when these things began. Did you just find out about it through your culture or your friends?
Honey: I found out about it because I was taking free dance classes in New York. I loved to dance. My first styles of dance were ballet and African, and hip-hop. I was dancing for 12, 13 years in Brooklyn; it was literally a block from my house, the building next door was my middle school.
Kim: New York needs you back!
Honey: I am coming back! I just need to make my mark in LA. The good thing is that every time I come back to New York and I show up and show face, they go crazy.
Kim: Why is New York better than other places?
Honey: I love New York so much because of the ballroom scene and the culture and the art.
Kim: Why do you think people come to live in New York from other places?
Honey: People come here to make their dreams come true. New York shows people how to be very hard working because everyone else is making stuff happen around you.
Kim: Why is New York so hard?
Honey: It is difficult to live here because there are so many people doing the same thing. To really stand out, you really have to put the work in. When you live here you become this person who is determined and ambitious. I also feel you elevate in a certain way – your personality, your style, your energy, you just carry that with you. You have to make it here, like the old song says.
Kim: What's the most inspiring part of New York these days?
Honey: I get blown away when I see a great outfit in the streets.
Kim: Where are you seeing those outfits?
Honey: Mostly in downtown Brooklyn. I'm talking style, fuck fashion; it's how you make it work, how you put it together. So when I see a cute outfit, I get inspired.
Kim: What's your favourite New York music.
Honey: House music.
Kim: What's your favourite New York movie of all time?
Honey: *The Devil Wears Prada.*
Kim: What is your favourite New York street?
Honey: I love Delancey Street.
Kim: Who is your favourite New Yorker?
Honey: My favourite New Yorker is in ballroom: the Queen of Brooklyn, whose name is the Baked Cookie, but we call her Courtney Balenciaga.
Kim: Why do you love her?
Honey: Because she knows every street, she knows every person, everywhere she goes in New York, people love her. She is just one of those girls.
Kim: How'd you get the name Honey?
Honey: I was on the pier voguing and my gay mother was watching me and was like, 'You vogue sweet, you vogue sweet, it's like honey.' When she said honey, it just clicked. Before becoming a Balenciaga, I was a LaBeija, which was the first house in ballroom. I was voguing on the pier by West Fourth and Christopher Street. Any time, but especially at night. Everyone vogues on the pier.
Kim: Do you think some day you will be a parent?
Honey: Absolutely. I will be the mother of a house one day. I am the mother of a house right now! I am the West Coast mother of the house of Juicy Couture.
Kim: Is there a house of Fendi?
Honey: Oh my God, there is!
Kim: Honey, you're the best!
Honey: No, *you're* the best.

Pat Cleveland

Before there were supermodels, there was Pat Cleveland. After growing up in Spanish Harlem, she became one of the first African-American fashion models to achieve large-scale success. She began to design her own clothes as a teenager and was working a model by the age of 15. She later signed with Wilhelmina Models and Cleveland's face was soon on the cover of every fashion magazine possible in the 1970s. Today, she writes, sings and, yes, still models.

Nylon Baguette bag (left), Baguette Re-edition beaded-leather bag (centre), leather Baguette bag (right), baseball cap, cashmere pullover, sequined embroidered skirt, gaiters with cotton socks, and leather clogs.

Kim Hastreiter: So tell me a bit about growing up in NYC.

Pat Cleveland: I was born in New York and grew up on the Upper-Upper East Side, on Lexington Avenue in the East 90s, which was the 'golden edge' of Spanish Harlem. I went to a public school. It was a mix of Puerto Ricans, Jewish, Irish, and Blacks. At night, you would hear the Irish bars filled with people laughing and drinking; you'd see the Jewish on their way to pray at the synagogue and the Latinos getting ready for Saturday night on their stoops with curlers in their hair, playing conga drums. There would be jazz festivals in the street, and people would be dancing. Blacks groups were out every weekend singing in harmony. It was that liveliness you kind of feel in New York, all of the time. My mother is a painter, named Ladybird. Being a woman of colour from Georgia she didn't have so many opportunities. She paints Black-American history and is actually quite known now. My aunt was a dancer, I was their mascot.

Kim: How did your career as a model start?

Pat: I was discovered because of the train. I was 14 years old at the time and I used to make my own clothes. I was taking the subway with my friend Frances, who was Puerto Rican, and I noticed this lady following me. Frances says, 'Oh no, she's after us, we better run. And I said, 'I'm not running from anybody', so I turned around and saw that she was really well dressed. She said, 'I am so happy you stopped to talk to me; I have been chasing you across 42nd Street!' Now you know how crowded it is taking the shuttle at a certain hours so when I stopped, people were falling like dominoes behind me – you know how it is when you stop the pace in New York. She told me, 'I'm doing this article for *Vogue*. Could you please tell me who you are and who made your clothes?' I was like, '*I* made these clothes.' I told her my name and she said, 'I am going to write an article about you for *Vogue*.' Here is my card and she gave it to me. And it said *Vogue*, and it was like a golden moment; everything stood still.

Kim: Do you remember what her name was?

Pat: Amanda. She was [fashion editor] Carrie Donovan's assistant. In the meantime, Mom sent pictures of me out to the magazines, but they rejected me because I was not the right look at the time. Then I get this invitation to meet Mrs Johnson, the founder of *Ebony*. I was like 15. I dressed up like a virgin, all in white, and went to the presidential suite at the Waldorf Astoria. She said to me, 'I want you to come and do our show around America for three months. You can bring your mother as your chaperone.' So there I was in a Greyhound bus travelling around America, 15 years old, with my mother. With all the European collections that Mrs Johnson had brought in the belly of the bus. We were like a travelling band!

Kim: That is a great story. *Ebony* was such an amazing and important magazine for women of colour at that time.

Pat: After that I met everyone. Muhammad Ali wanted to marry me, and even asked my mother! He started chasing me around the country – if I was at a show he would be there! By the time I was 16 or 17, I had met Antonio Lopez[1] and designed a line of clothes for Henri Bendel. But I wasn't smart enough and couldn't sew fast enough to supply them for what they wanted. I didn't want to have to tell sewers who were older than me what to do. That was my downfall; I am not a good manager or a business person. I was also 16!

'I knew Charles James when he used to live on the sixth floor of the Chelsea Hotel. I'd stand on the table in his room and Antonio would sketch me.'

Kim: After all these years do you still feel like a New Yorker?

Pat: I am a New Yorker. I was born on Roosevelt Island, where there was a hospital for people who had no money or who had tuberculosis. At the time they used some properties on the island for the firemen to practice, so things were always on fire. The man who built St Patrick's Cathedral also built a church there. So the first view I had as a newborn baby was of Manhattan, several streets away from Bloomingdale's.

Kim: What do you love about New York these days?

Pat: I love the people, all the levels of people who feel what they feel and what humanity is and what we need to do. It makes me have compassion for people and it makes me appreciate what I have. Then in my world, if I get into a nice hotel, like the new Chelsea Hotel, I appreciate the people who make things that make the world beautiful. Sometimes you go for a walk, and you are so glad that there are trees on a street; you look for where nature is. I am so glad that they made the High Line; it's just new areas of nature. That for me is really important. The architecture, well, there is nothing like it in the world. This little rock that we're on, it just supports that.

Kim: You're currently staying at the new Chelsea Hotel?

Pat: Yeah. I can't believe how sweet and quiet it is there. My friend Richard Bernstein[2] used to live there, long ago before they redid the hotel. He used to do all the covers for Andy Warhol's *Interview*. He was on the first floor when you went past check-in, at the counter, to the left. I went to look and they hadn't finished that part yet and the door is there, the original metal door, that he had there. The last time I had been to the Chelsea, I was on my way back to Europe [in 2002] and something said to me, 'Go to the Chelsea and see your friend Richard.' So I went up to the front desk and asked to see him and they were like he hasn't been out of his apartment for a week. I was knocking on the door, but I had to go catch my plane and I couldn't stay any longer. So I got my plane and went back to Europe. I found out later that he was dead behind the door. Nobody had checked on him. Sean [MacPherson], who owns the hotel now, has done such a good job. Everything works so perfectly, and it has so much history.

Kim: Who else did you know at the Chelsea Hotel back in the day?

Pat: I knew Charles James.[3] I would go there with Antonio. I think he lived on the sixth or the eighth floor. He had all his patterns hanging from the ceiling and he lived under the patterns. I'd stand on the table and Antonio would sketch me, and Charles would come over and say, 'Now you have to be like a wishbone', and put me into a position.

Kim: What is your favourite New York food?

Pat: Vegan!

Kim: What's your favourite New York music?

Pat: Anything in the street. Music belongs to everyone.

Kim: What is your favourite mode of New York transportation?

Pat: I like the big black cars. With the roof open, where you can see the sky.

Kim: Do you think there is still something like a New York style?

Pat: Well, lots of people walk a lot here, so a flat shoe is a necessity for real New Yorkers' good health. I do love a high heel, but to wear them here you have to have a mode of transportation. That big black car shoe, the my-sole-never-touches-the-ground shoe.

Kim: Bingo.

1. Antonio Lopez was a Puerto Rican fashion illustrator whose bold and dynamic work was often created in collaboration with art director Juan Ramos, and was published in magazines such as *Interview*. He died of an AIDS-related illness in 1987.

2. New York-born pop artist Richard Bernstein created over 120 celebrity portraits for *Interview* magazine from 1972 until 1989. Andy Warhol paid Bernstein's colourful work his ultimate compliment, when he remarked that, 'he makes everyone looks so famous'. Bernstein died from complications from AIDS aged 62 in 2002.

3. Until his retirement in 1958 after a three-decade career, English-American fashion designer Charles James (1906-1978) was a dominant force in the fashion world. Credited by Christian Dior as the inspiration for the French designer's New Look, James' designs for ballgowns, capes and coats were hugely influential. An eccentric, snobbish perfectionist, the couturier moved into the Chelsea Hotel in 1964, taking three rooms on the sixth floor – 618, 620 and 622 – where he stayed until his death in 1978.

‘It’s not a bag, it’s a Baguette!’

Milah Libin

Milah Libin is a girl after my own heart: a born-and-bred downtown creative New Yorker who dreams big and to whom nothing seems impossible. This is such a New York City quality. Fearlessness, drive, love of work, and love for and inspiration from this big, crazy, creative city. Milah is just one of those native New Yorkers who knows she can do anything if she works hard enough. She saw her parents do it in Brooklyn; she saw her grandparents do it on the Upper West Side. It’s a family trait, I guess. Lately in her spare time, on top of a full-time job, Milah edits and publishes two art magazines – one called *Dizzy*, and the other, a children’s magazine, called *Mishou*. She recently also launched a free online TV channel through *Dizzy* featuring experimental films, documentaries, artist-studio visits, and cartoons for kids. I love *Dizzy*; I love *Mishou*; I love Milah. And I thank God every day that people like Milah still live and work in our textured patchwork hometown.

Leather Baguette bag, green wool jumper, blue wool jumper, wool gloves, knitted socks, and leather clogs.

Kim Hastreiter: You've been making movies lately, right?
Milah Libin: Yes, I've recently been shooting short documentaries about artists, but when I was in my early twenties, I was directing music videos.
Kim: How old are you now?
Milah: I am 29.
Kim: You're an old baby, Milah. Where were you born?
Milah: I was born at St Vincent's Hospital in Greenwich Village. At the time, my parents lived in Brooklyn and they got a taxi cab all the way to St Vincent's to birth me, and then we went back to Brooklyn. When my older brother was born, my parents were living on Ludlow Street where they met. Right upstairs from the old Max Fish bar![1] They were next-door neighbours in the same apartment building. They fell in love, so they knocked the wall down between the two apartments.
Kim: Did they get married right away or did they just live together?
Milah: They lived together for a few years.
Kim: What did your parents do?
Milah: At that time, my dad was a gaffer on films. He was also a bartender at Hurrah[2] and my mom was a waitress at Sugar Reef.[3]
Kim: Hurrah? I used to go dancing there almost every night in the 1970s, and I'd eat at Sugar Reef often, too!
Milah: My dad was a bartender there for a long time, but when they started doing live shows, with the Cure, Blondie, and Suicide, he started filming there. He has this insane footage of all these amazing concerts. I am going to put them soon on the *Dizzy* TV channel. They had my brother when they were living on Ludlow Street, but when my grandparents would visit they would have to step over people with needles sticking out of them, so they finally moved.
Kim: So your grandparents were New Yorkers?
Milah: My dad's parents are super cool. My grandfather moved to New York to go to Columbia for acting, and then after that, he ended up becoming a Broadway producer. He is 91, lives on the Upper West Side, and he still runs the Circle in the Square Theatre. He was president of Broadway Equity; he is pretty iconic. My grandmother is 91, also, and they take cabs, go to the theatre, opera and movies.
Kim: *Legend*! New York is a good city to get old in. Where did your parents grow up?
Milah: My dad grew up on 100th Street and Riverside Drive. My mom grew up in rural Pennsylvania, moved to New York when she was 21, and stayed. My dad now works in films as a DP, and my mom works in public schools, non-profit education.
Kim: When all the junkies made them decide to move, where did you all go?
Milah: They moved to Park Slope where we were raised.
Kim: So you are a Brooklyn girl. What made you want to stay in New York?
Milah: I just didn't know anything else and any time I did leave and saw other places, it just wasn't New York City! I am very close to my family, and that is a huge reason why I stayed here. It just always felt right – and it was home.
Kim: As I'm sure you know from watching your parents and grandparents, New Yorkers work their asses off. How do you relax in a city like New York? What is your idea of relaxing?

'I ate so much pizza growing up – I probably had a slice every day. My dad was literally John Travolta, eating two pieces of pizza on top of each other.'

Milah: I grew up right next to Prospect Park, and still live next to it. People don't realize that there is actually a lot of nature and quiet places in New York, especially in Brooklyn, so I definitely spend a lot of time here when I need to have some quiet time.
Kim: Why is New York is better than other places?
Milah: I don't want to say it is better, but it is different. It is its own species and just can't be compared to other places. A big part of it is the actual geography of the city, especially the subway system. Everyone takes the subway, it doesn't matter where you are from, how much money you have, what colour you are, what gender you are or age, little kids, old people – *everyone* takes the trains. So you are faced with diversity on every single block. Block to block it is so different and I think that is the beautiful thing about New York. The best parts about New York are also those sidewalk stories when you make friends with the old lady who lives down your block or the guy at the deli who knows exactly what kind of sandwich you order every day.
Kim: What do you love most here?
Milah: I love the people. I love New Yorkers. I love the old people in New York. That's the best part of New York. And the food is incredible because of all the cultures we have here.
Kim: What is your favourite New York food?
Milah: I ate so much pizza growing up – I probably had a slice of pizza every day. My dad was literally John Travolta, eating two pieces of pizza on top of each other.[4] So pizza first, but now I could eat a different cuisine every day, for real.
Kim: Why do you think people come to New York to live from other places?
Milah: For a lot of people who come from small towns or places where they just can't connect, they see the possibility of connecting with their tribe here and know that exists here. It's represented in films and music and books in this way, but it really is like that! It is not fiction. It is as magical as it seems in all the movies, music, stories and books. It's not easy though; it's definitely not easy.
Kim: No, it's *hard*. How did you get your first apartment in New York City and what was the rent? Because getting an apartment is always a saga in New York.
Milah: My first apartment was in Bushwick, right off the J train, with my boyfriend at the time, and I think we found it on Craigslist. It was a tiny apartment and cost $1,400. I can't even believe we lived there together. We lived there for five years.
Kim: That is cheap, wow.
Milah: Yeah, it ain't going to happen now!
Kim: How do you find the energy in New York post-Covid? Is it different?
Milah: I feel that the city came back stronger than ever. Throughout the pandemic and the early moments of Covid, New York was a really special place to be. I was house-sitting during Covid, on a block in Fort Greene, and every day at 7pm, they had a dance party outside, where they blasted Martin Luther King's speeches over dance-hall music, and everyone danced, and it was amazing. I feel that spirit that is truly New York was always there. It is complicated because I feel nervous about safety, but then I also feel like, 'Oh my God, I am back in it!'

1. Max Fish opened on Ludlow Street in 1989 and quickly became a fixture on the Lower East Side bar scene. It moved to Orchard Street in 2014, but did not reopen after New York's 2020 Covid-19 lockdowns.

2. A nightclub on 36 West 62nd Street, Hurrah opened in 1976 and was soon the centre of punk, new wave and industrial music in New York. Renowned booking agent Ruth Polsky worked at the club and brought many British bands there, including New Order's first-ever US show in September 1980. It closed that same year, but not before David Bowie filmed the video for 'Fashion' at the venue.

3. 'The wonderfully tawdry setting at Sugar Reef,' reads a 1990 *New York Times* review, 'is reminiscent of a nightmare Cook's Tour to an island where the boorish natives wear backward baseball caps and Budweiser T-shirts, all the bananas are plastic, and the only foam you see is atop pastel-colored blender drinks.'

4. In the opening credit sequence of *Saturday Night Fever* (1977), to the sound of the Beegees' 'Staying Alive', John Travolta's character Tony Manero visits Lenny's Pizza at 1969 86th Street in Bensonhurst and orders two slices of pizza, which he 'double-deckers' and eats at the same time. Lenny's remains open; a Manero double slice now costs $6 plus tax.

Calvin Royal III

Meet Calvin Royal III, indefatigable, graceful, poised, and only the third African-American to become a principal dancer with the American Ballet Theatre. He first moved to New York in 2006 when he was accepted at the troupe's Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis School. He was later awarded the $50,000 Leonore Annenberg Arts Fellowship, which he used to work and study at the world's leading dance and ballet institutions, including the Royal Ballet in London and the Mariinsky Theatre in St Petersburg, Russia. After New York's siren call drew Royal back to the American Ballet Theatre, he was promoted to principal dancer in 2020, partly thanks to his being, as the *New York Times* critic noted, 'the most elegant male dancer in the company'.

Leather Baguette bag (right), soft leather Trunk Baguette bag (left), baseball cap, and knitted socks.

Tell us what you do, Calvin.
Calvin Royal III: I'm a principal dancer at the American Ballet Theatre and a founder of the Apollo Foundation, my own personal charitable venture that aims to foster, uplift, teach and mentor promising young dancers.
When did you first develop an interest in dance?
Calvin: I was in the second to third grade. I had come home one day after school and was doing my homework when I saw this ad on TV for an audition for the local community project called *The Chocolate Nutcracker.* I immediately called my mom and asked her to take me to the audition. I wanted to check it out; it looked so cool and exciting, and that was where I was first exposed to dancing. I immediately fell in love with it. I got into the production and I remember coming home after the rehearsal and putting on the music and trying all the steps. That was when I realized my love for dance.
When did you understand that ballet could actually be a career?
Calvin: I came to ballet later than most. The exposure on *The Chocolate Nutcracker* was amazing and sparked that love for dancing. I had auditioned to do performing arts at my high school in St Petersburg, Florida. I got into West African, jazz, hip hop, and all these other genres, but I was 14 and a half and a freshman in high school when I did ballet the first time. It wasn't total love then; I didn't even know if I wanted to carry on as it was so difficult. No one warned me how hard it would be! Luckily, I had an incredible teacher who, whether you were the best in the class or if you needed extra work, treated you like you had the potential to become a ballet dancer. Every year she would take a group of kids to a scholarship competition called the Youth America Grand Prix and I was one of the students she took. It was through that that my scores allowed me to compete in the finals in New York City. That was when I was offered a scholarship to train at the American Ballet Theatre school for my senior year. Having that opportunity to move and train in New York, being around all the famous dancers who I had seen on DVDs and VHS tapes was amazing as I first started out training in dance professionally. When I moved to the city, I knew that this was where I wanted to be, and this was where I wanted to see if could make that dream of becoming a professional dancer come true.
Did you always want to live in New York?
Calvin: When I was younger, I used to watch *Home Alone 2: Lost in New York* around the holiday season. It starred Macaulay Culkin, and I always felt that there was a piece of me in his character. I know it may sound a little cliché, but I just wanted to get lost in New York and go to all these stores and to Central Park. I always saw New York as a place of discovery.
Where do you live in New York now?
Calvin: Currently I live in Queens – but I don't want to say the neighbourhood because I've found an oasis here! The thing about New York is that we all find what works for us and I have found a nice balance between this and city life. It's far enough from the city never to feel overwhelming. It's an oasis and I want to keep that for myself!
Is New York now the place you call home?
Calvin: Absolutely. I have been here for 16 years, and it is the longest I have ever lived in one place. I think it's safe to call myself a New Yorker now. New York is where I've been able to put down roots and invest in myself as an artist, but also live the life that I wanted to create. This is home for me.
Have you ever thought about leaving New York?
Calvin: I've travelled and seen other places for extended amounts of time, but I always feel that longing for New York when I'm away for too long. That is how you know that it's where you want to be.
Where did you live when you first moved to New York?
Calvin: I lived in Cobble Hill, Brooklyn, for my first four years. I was with a host family. It was a two-bedroom apartment and four of us lived there. Then our lease was up, and it was time to find the next place. I reached out to this family friend who didn't even realize I lived in New York. She lived in Crown Heights, Brooklyn. So I went from Cobble Hill, which is like this super picturesque movie set, to Crown Heights, which has this rich Caribbean population. It was just buzzing in that way I love so much. I found the family friend who had her own brownstone there, so I lived with her for four years, which was an awesome time.
What makes New York the place where everyone wants to live at some stage of their lives?
Calvin: Having lived here for this long and having been able to travel to other cities, I think all roads lead back to New York. I think it is a place where people can really find themselves. They can find their identity; they can find their community. They can find so much here. Then there is culture and concerts and Broadway. Obviously, Central Park. I love to go biking and I love to be in nature. Sometimes I wish that New York had more nature, but I do think I've managed to find a balance between getting outdoors and the hustle and bustle of the city along with my husband. He's a pianist and we have built that balance together.
What makes New York so difficult? Is it the cost of living?
Calvin: I think New York has always been very expensive to live in. From groceries to rent to transportation. Another thing that I've discovered as I get older is that the feeling of quiet is so rare. To hear absolute quiet in New York is almost impossible! When you experience it outside of the city, you realize just how loud New York is. That can take its toll. There will always be those feelings of stress and anxiety that come with living in the city.
Despite feeling up against it in the concrete jungle, what is it about New Yorkers that makes them so loyal to their city?
Calvin: Once you've gotten a glimpse of the side of New York that calls you, and the way in which that can sporadically happen, it makes everything more real and possible. At least that is how it was for me when I first moved here. It was so overwhelming and hard to find my way. The networking and meeting new people and feeling like I didn't belong sometimes was tough. It requires patience and endurance. As you live here for longer, you discover who your real friends are and who your community is, and most importantly who you are. I think for New Yorkers, being able to build a life here is a badge of honour that you would never feel elsewhere.
And finally, what do you love most about New York?
Calvin: I love that it's the place where I have been able to make my dreams come true.

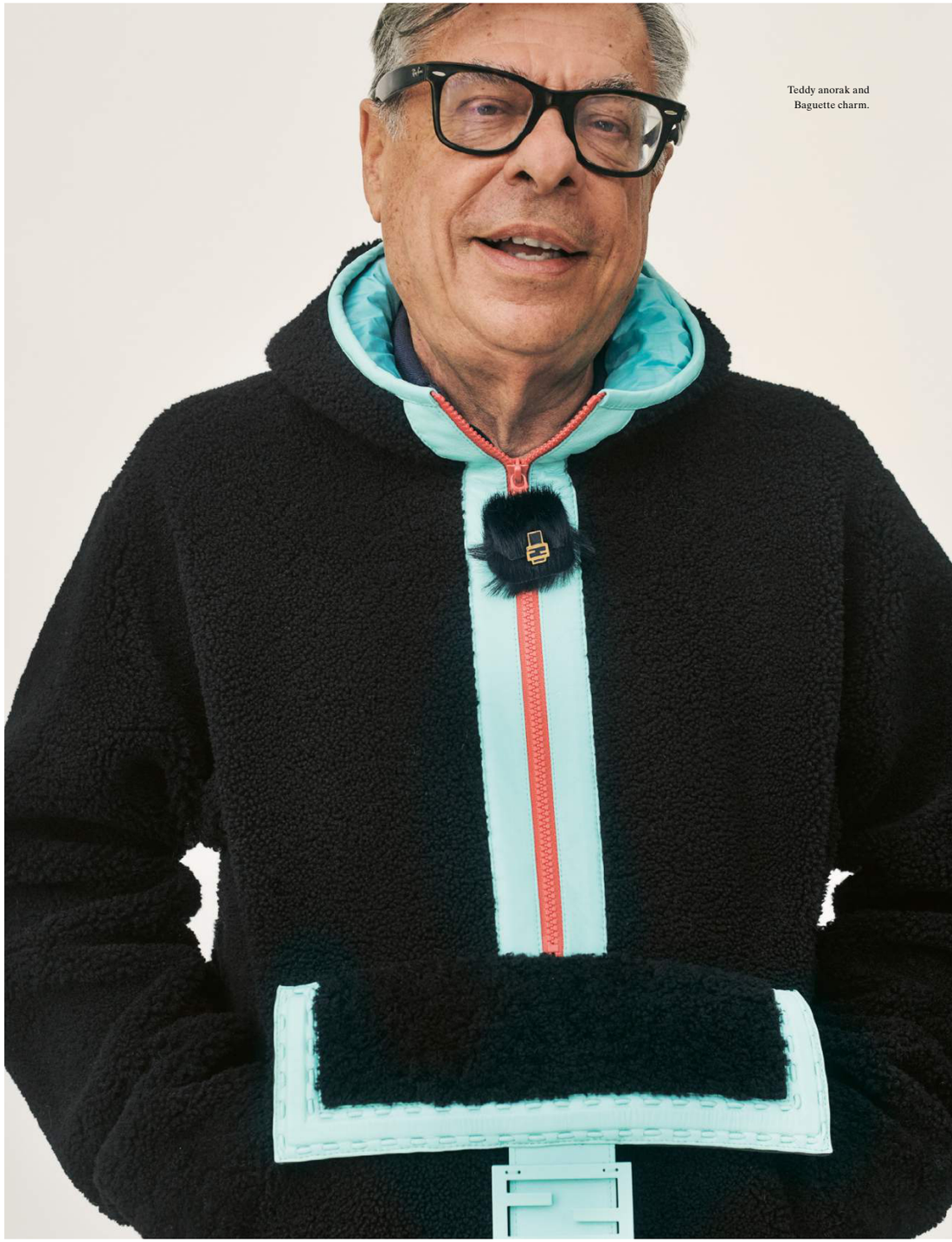
Interview by Rahim Attarzadeh.

'I was offered a scholarship at the American Ballet Theatre school. Being around the famous dancers who I'd only ever seen on VHS tapes was amazing.'

'It's not a bag, it's a Baguette!'

Bob Colacello

Meet the inimitable and talented writer Bob Colacello. He started his career as the young new editor of Andy Warhol's *Interview* in the 1970s when the magazine was having a really weird Republican moment. Gerald Ford was president at the time and had four sexy kids (the gays went crazy for his sons), and an alcoholic wife who would later found the legendary rehab the Betty Ford Center. If ever a Republican was going to represent glamour, it was that moment, so Bob and his boss Andy Warhol dove deep into it. Colacello's fascination with this 1970s Washington D.C. glamour escalated even further in the 1980s, when Hollywood movie star Ronald Reagan was elected president. Colacello's book about the Reagans, *Ronnie & Nancy: Their Path to the White House – 1911 to 1980* was a hit, and he is currently working on a sequel.



Teddy anorak and Baguette charm.

Kim Hastreiter: Describe what you do, Bob.
Bob Colacello: I most recently have become a male model.
Kim: You modelled in the Tommy Hilfiger show last night.
Bob: Yes, I really liked it; it is much easier than writing. But I am a writer. I am also associate director of the Peter Marino Art Foundation and senior advisor to the Vito Schnabel Gallery. I love Vito. He likes older people he can learn things from. So I am busy.
Kim: Where do you live now?
Bob: I keep an apartment in Manhattan, but my main residence is Southampton, Long Island. I have a little cottage there and a studio next door for my writing.
Kim: Were you born in New York?
Bob: I was born in Brooklyn, but we lived in Bensonhurst. My parents were also born in Brooklyn. My grandparents lived in Borough Park. It was mostly Italian then; now it is mainly Hasidic Jews. There was a huge church there, Saint Catherine's. The priests had limousines. The Infanta's crown got stolen – it had real jewels in it. Then it reappeared a week later and was declared a miracle, so all these Catholics came from Brooklyn, Queens and Staten Island to put $5 in the box. My grandmother was like, 'It's no miracle! It's a Mafia miracle. They are taking a cut of everything!'
Kim: Did you spend your childhood there?
Bob: When I was eight years old, in 1954, we moved to this brand-new suburb called Plainview on Long Island. A year earlier, it had been just a big potato field and then overnight it became 10,000 split-level houses.
Kim: What did your parents do?
Bob: My father was the first Italian-American executive working with a Swiss commodities-trading firm on Wall Street; he ran their coffee operation. My mother was a sales lady at Saks Fifth Avenue in Garden City.
Kim: Were you in Manhattan a lot growing up?
Bob: No. As a child my mother took us a few times a year to Radio City Music Hall for the Easter and Christmas shows. We'd have lunch at Schrafft's, or go shopping at Saks, then light candles at St Patrick's Cathedral. But when I was in high school a friend and I would tell our mothers we were going to the other's house on a Saturdays, but we'd get on a train into Manhattan, go to Greenwich Village, and walk around Washington Square Park hoping to run into Barbra Streisand. We'd wander around for an hour and half, staring at the beatniks and then get a train back.
Kim: When you moved to Manhattan as an adult where did you live?
Bob: I went to Columbia Film School for a year, and had a walk-up on 105th Street, but as soon as I started working for *Interview* and got paid a little more I got a studio apartment across from the Carlyle, in some white brick building.
Kim: How did you get the job at *Interview*?
Bob: I graduated from Georgetown and decided I wanted to be a film director. In 1969, everyone my age wanted to be the next Fellini or Antonioni, including me. So my very nice parents paid for tuition at Columbia Film School. The professor of film history and criticism there, Andrew Sarris, was one of the real intellectuals who wrote for the *Village Voice*. In his class we had to review a movie a week. Then he would take the two or three best reviews and publish them in the *Village Voice*, so a couple of times I got chosen. One night I got a call at my parents' house at dinner time, and this guy says, 'Hi, I'm Søren Agenoux,[1] the editor of this new magazine that Andy Warhol has started called *Interview*. Andy has been reading your reviews in the *Village Voice* and he wants to meet you; maybe you can write for us.'
Kim: Oh, my God!
Bob: I was thrilled. My parents said, 'We forbid you! You cannot meet with this creep. He does movies about boys who want to be girls!' I mean, Andy was controversial. He was the one who invented 'bad publicity was good publicity'. Of course, the following day,

'My parents said, 'We forbid you to meet with this creep Warhol! He does movies about boys who want to be girls!' I mean, Andy was *controversial*.'

after I finished class at Columbia, I went downtown and started writing reviews for *Interview*.
Kim: Where were *Interview*'s offices?
Bob: At 33 Union Square West. The Factory was on the sixth floor. It was a small loft and then *Interview* was in a storage room on the tenth floor. Andy painted in another storage room on the eighth floor. One time I handed a review in there, Søren told me, 'Go down to the sixth floor, Andy wants to talk to you.' Andy told me, 'Oh gee, you write so well, do you want to ride up to the film festival with me?' He was very clever, hiring very young people who didn't get paid a lot, had no idea what they were doing, but had different ideas and weren't stuck in a Condé Nast way of making a magazine. I remember going with Andy to the Film Festival at Lincoln Center. We got there really early, and he said, 'Oh, we'll just sit here and I'll take some Polaroids of you.' Andy could make anyone look great. I looked like a young Elvis Presley.
Kim: How did you end up as editor?
Bob: One day I went to the office on the 10th floor and it was padlocked. So I went to the sixth floor, and Andy was sitting at the front desk, eating his lunch – pureed carrots and spinach, and brownies, because he'd been shot just two years earlier and his stomach was a mess. He said, 'Paul Morrissey needs to talk to you.' Paul told me, 'We had to fire Søren. Andy and I think you should be the new editor.' I said, 'I'm in graduate school and never did anything like this!' He responded, 'It's really easy, you do the layout and it gets printed in Chinatown and you put one of these on every page.' He handed me a stack of stills of Rita Hayworth from *Gilda*, from the 1940s and 1950s. I asked Paul why use these when *Interview* had all reviews of Pasolini movies and underground movies. He repeated, 'Just put these on every page.' Then he said, 'We'll pay you $40 a week.' I said, 'OK.'
Kim: That's such a crazy New York story. You still have to hustle and work really hard here though.
Bob: Yes, you have to work, but in New York you must also go out a lot, because being in the right place at the right time is how we all made it. I always say don't worry too much about what you want to do, just meet people and get out there, because most careers are accidents.
Kim: When New Yorkers feel lazy and just want to go to bed, you've got to force yourself to go out because a new opportunity will come of it.
Bob: You get dragged somewhere by a friend and you will meet the love of your life or be offered a new job. It is like a moving kaleidoscopic lottery-merry-go-round. You should not live in New York if you are a homebody. When you go to a party, you might meet a doctor, a model, an artist or a banker, all at the same party. New York is so diverse with all kinds of people and races and ethnicities and sexualities, as well as all kinds of industries. The financial industry is very important and because of it we have such a thriving art world. They go together, and Andy always said that he thought high finance was creative. He thought science was art, too.
Kim: New York is tough and the people who come here are often not average.
Bob: Creative people from smaller towns and smaller cities come because they have much more freedom here. And there's a big potential for success. It's like the song, if you can make it here, you can make it anywhere.
Kim: What's your favourite mode of New York transportation?
Bob: Yellow cabs.
Kim: Your favourite New York music.
Bob: Disco.
Kim: Your favourite New York movie?
Bob: Warhol and Morrissey films: *Flesh*, *Trash* or *Heat*.
Kim: Your favourite New Yorker?
Bob: Diana Vreeland. I got to know her through Andy. The best thing she ever told me, while looking through one of my issues of *Interview*, was, 'This photograph is so ordinary.' I said, 'People like that sort of thing.' Then she said, 'I *never* want you hear you say that again! Your job as editor is *not* to give people what they want – it is to give people what they don't know they want yet!'

1. Søren Agenoux, according to the publishers Printed Matter, is a 'mysterious' figure who was 'by differing accounts a mail artist, playwright, suspected thief and forger'. In 1966, his anti-Vietnam War version of Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* was staged at Café Cinno, an off-off-Broadway theatre. According to the book, *The Downtown Pop Underground*, Andy Warhol saw the play three times, possibly because, 'The play was packed with allusions to pop culture and Factory scene inside jokes.' Pat Loud of *An American Family*, the first-ever reality show when broadcast in 1973, met Agenoux at the Chelsea Hotel. Her conclusion? 'A kind of creepy guy.'

'It's not a bag, it's a Baguette!'

Joey Arias

Joey Arias is a legendary New Yorker and an incredible artist adored by many. He's a brilliant singer in a style that is jazzy, hilarious, outrageous, and almost indescribable. Imagine Yma Sumac singing Led Zeppelin. Joey is a true original, performing, writing music, and most of all, making the world laugh really hard. As he describes himself, 'I'm my own public-relations person.' To be transparent, I moved to New York with Joey in 1976 – he is still my bestie – and lately a whole new generation of creative babies are discovering him, because he is one of the most unique hilarious and brilliant performers of our time.

Soft leather Trunk Baguette bag,
Fendi clothing bag,
gaiters with cotton socks,
and leather clogs.

Kim Hastreiter: Where do you live?
Joey Arias: I live in Greenwich Village, near Washington Square Park.
Kim: When did you come here? What made you want to come live in New York City?
Joey: I arrived with you in 1976! It had been a dream of mine ever since I was a child. I was born in North Carolina, and then abducted by my parents to live in LA. I always hated LA, but then I met you, Kim, and it was like a perfect union. I wanted to come to New York because I knew the real me would blossom. I wanted to find my tribe, the misfits, the artists, the different, the unusual. So we drove to New York together and I never left.
Kim: Who is your tribe here?
Joey: My tribe is anyone who understands the art of being original and being yourself, and being honest and having fun.
Kim: Why do you think people come here to live in New York?
Joey: Because they believe in this dream that only works if you want to be part of the fabric of New York. If you come here to conquer New York, it will expel you. I've seen it too many times. I came humbly. I literally chopped everything off when we drove away; I changed my life forever and thought, 'New York City I am here for you, I want to be part of you, and I want to shine with you, and I will do whatever you want me to do in New York City.' I found myself in fashion, working at Fiorucci, and then everything just started falling into place. Fiorucci wasn't really about fashion; it was performance. I was performing there every day, big time. I was there to make sales, trying to make money. The more I performed the more I sold and the more I sold the bigger my pay cheque. Someone once told me I was engineered to perform!
Kim: You were the big star at Fiorucci. Tell me about some of the most amazing people you sold things to there.
Joey: In 1976, Fiorucci was the hottest spot in New York. It was crazy. The manager would grab me and say, 'I need you to help my friend… Lauren Bacall!' Then he was like, 'I need you to help my friend… Jackie Onassis… I need you to help John and Yoko.' I remember the King and Queen of Spain[1] came in 1977, and Elio Fiorucci was there, and they closed the store down and they closed the street up. And I curtseyed like a lady and everyone was laughing. They said, 'This is Joey, our star salesperson, so he will take you around the store.' I was trying to talk Spanish and not laugh, and they were like, 'Whatever'.
Kim: Which king and queen?
Joey: I don't know, whoever the King and Queen of Spain were in 1977. I took the bodyguards throughout the store, and I showed them everything. I was like, 'I'm going to make a billion dollars commission today' – and then at the end of the day, the only thing they bought was a fucking keychain!
Kim: That is hysterical. I know Andy Warhol fell in love with you, when he met you there. So who else came in?
Joey: Oh my God, the list goes on and on: Andy, Diana Ross, Donna Summer. Some people asked for me and others didn't know me and would look at me and be like, 'who are you?' We laughed, we just bonded. Like Divine, she knew who I was, and then Sylvester came in, the Mamas & the Papas came in when they were visiting from California.
Kim: You are the type of person, who by nature, talks to everyone equally. You speak to the taxi driver as you would to the King and Queen of Spain. That is something I love about you. I think famous people really love to be talked to like normal people, right? Because people never talk to celebrities normally; they talk to them weirdly. Who was the most famous person you ever saw in New York City and what were they doing when you saw them?
Joey: I don't know if you remember, Kim, I was going to meet you at the Plaza Hotel one day after work and the Queen of England was in town. She was coming down 59th Street, and I knew she was coming, but I had to cross the street to meet you because I didn't want to be late, and literally as I crossed the street, I crossed right in front of her car, and she waved at me and smiled. When I got to the Plaza I told you I just saw the Queen right there and you were like, 'Oh my God!' Another famous person experience you and I had together that was really out of control was also at the Plaza Hotel in the 1970s. We met Salvador Dalí and his wife, Gala. That was like sitting with an art book.
Kim: We had dinner with them, and cocktails! All I remember is that they ordered millions of plates of food and then the two of them only ate bouillon!
Joey: They gave us Scorpions, and I drank a Grasshopper.
Kim: Dalí was getting his moustache trimmed when we arrived in the Palm Court, the little spot off the Plaza's lobby.
Joey: I know! That was crazy.
Kim: What's your favourite part of New York these days, 45 years later?
Joey: Our neighbourhood, Greenwich Village, Kim. I love being at home, then walking through Washington Square Park to your apartment and onto your terrace, where I can see everything from uptown to downtown.
Kim: Tell me about your new album.
Joey: I met these two really great producer gentlemen at the start of the pandemic who said they wanted to record me, so here we are a year and four months later, we have recorded an EP, three songs for a video, and we are going into the studio to finish the album. When they asked me what I wanted to record, I said the past, the present and the future. The past would be something I did a long time ago, the present would be what I am doing now, like a Billie Holiday vibe, and the future would be what we come up with.
Kim: Talk about your new song, 'No One Knows'. It's my favourite!
Joey: With what's going on in this world, our politics and health and planet, you look for answers and no one knows. Everyone's just trying to find out why people do certain things, and no one knows. Everyone is passing the buck because no one knows. This resonates really strongly with me at this confusing moment. The EP and videos will be out in October, and the album in spring 2023.
Kim: Joey, a few fast questions. What's your favourite New York food?
Joey: Originally, it was a hot dog right off the street. I used to love going to the corner to get a hot dog with sauerkraut and mustard, and go to Central Park, and eat my hot dog. Now just give me New York Italian food.
Kim: What's your favourite New York music?
Joey: Puerto Rican, baby. I love it because salsa has the beat that makes me think of New York walking down the street.
Kim: What's your favourite New York mode of transportation?
Joey: Taxis!
Kim: What's your favourite New York movie?
Joey: *Saturday Night Fever.*
Kim: Is there anything you hate about New York?
Joey : The only thing I hate about New York is when people come here and say that they are going to take over New York. I hate it when people talk like that. I also hate people who talk shit about New York, like, 'New York is dead'. I'm like, 'OK, you just need to leave!' New York is never dead.

'In 1976, Fiorucci was the hottest spot in New York. The manager would grab me and say, 'I need you to help my friend... Lauren Bacall!''

1. In 1977, the King and Queen of Spain were Juan Carlos I and his wife Sophia. Juan Carlos abdicated on June 18, 2014, hurt by a 2012 scandal involving a secret elephant-hunting trip to Botswana during which he was injured. Since 2014, he has been involved in a series of alleged corruption scandals involving Saudi kickbacks and illegal credit-card use. In August 2020, Juna Carlos left Spain and is now believed to be living in the United Arab Emirates.

Jocelyn Wildenstein

Jocelyn Wildenstein is a celebrated New York socialite famous for her outrageous feline looks and her beyond-extravagant lifestyle. (In 1999, she calculated she was spending $60,000 on her phone bill and nearly $550,000 on food and wine a year.) Wildenstein moved to the Upper East Side in 1978 after she married her billionaire businessman husband Alec, who was from a family of renowned art dealers (they divorced in 1999). We caught up with Wildenstein recently to see how the other half lives. After all, what would New York City be without a fabulously wealthy socialite in the mix?

Re-edition Baguette bag, baseball cap, silk dress, and wool gloves

Kim Hastreiter: What do you do?
Jocelyn Wildenstein: I am an art dealer. I had a gallery called the Wildenstein Gallery on 64th Street.
Kim: Where were you born?
Jocelyn: In Switzerland. I grew up in Lausanne, which is a lovely mountain place during the winter.
Kim: When did you move to New York City?
Jocelyn: I moved when I got married in 1978. We lived in this fabulous townhouse at 11 East 64th Street.
Kim: What made you want to stay here?
Jocelyn: New York is so totally different compared to Europe. It has a fabulous energy. You can do anything in New York. I love it!
Kim: Did you always stay uptown?
Jocelyn: Always uptown. My two children were born in New York ten months apart. Almost like twins. They went to school uptown at the Lycée Français.
Kim: So you raised your children in New York in a townhouse. Did you have a back yard for them to play in?
Jocelyn: I always lived next to Central Park, so the children were lucky enough to cross the street and go to the zoo at any time. It is lovely to have this park in the middle of New York. We also had a magnificent indoor pool at home, which was lovely during the New York winter. It was so exotic the way the decoration was done, with a fish tank and a pool. You were feeling totally not in New York.
Kim: Where do you live now?
Jocelyn: Now I live exactly next to the Carlyle [on East 76th Street].
Kim: Why is New York better than other places?
Jocelyn: New York has so many things we love: the museums, the ballet, the restaurants. It is a city really around the clock – and it has energy!
Kim: Do you still love the Upper East Side neighbourhood the best? Do you explore other neighbourhoods?
Jocelyn: Uptown is my favourite, but I also love to go downtown. All the restaurants downtown are so different. Now Brooklyn is fantastic, too.
Kim: What is your favourite street in New York? Is there a street that you love to walk down?
Jocelyn: If I were to walk, it would be to

'We were walking on Fifth and boom, there was Nureyev! He was with Jackie Kennedy at the time. He was so beautiful as well. Such charisma!'

look at the boutiques.
Kim: So you're a shopper! Where are the best stores these days?
Jocelyn: They are all on Fifth Avenue. Like Bergdorf Goodman. I can do my shopping and then go for lunch in the store.
Kim: Do you do a lot of walking?
Jocelyn: No, I don't walk a lot. I walk a bit to go shopping, this type of thing, but I don't go walking in the parks since I don't have my dogs any more. I had five Italian greyhounds, the smaller ones! I also had some exotic animals like a lynx. I bought him from a ranch in Kenya. He was so protective; he only loved me.
Kim: What is your favourite food in New York?
Jocelyn: I love the soft-shell crab; I'd never had it before I came to New York.
Kim: What is your favourite restaurant in New York?
Jocelyn: The oldest restaurant in New York: P.J. Clarke's!
Kim: What is your favourite New York music?
Jocelyn: 'New York, New York' from Frank Sinatra.
Kim: Do you have a favourite New York movie?
Jocelyn: *Breakfast at Tiffany's.*
Kim: Who is the most famous person you ever saw in New York City and what were they doing when you saw them?
Jocelyn: Oh, I met Nureyev! He was with Jackie Kennedy at the time.
Kim: That's a good one.
Jocelyn: We were walking on Fifth and boom, there he was! He was incredible and so beautiful as well. What charisma!
Kim: New Yorkers work really hard. How do you relax in New York?
Jocelyn: I have a siesta!
Kim: What is your favourite mode of transportation to get around New York?
Jocelyn: I take Uber; it is very easy, especially during the afternoon. If I have a special charity event or something I take out my car, but Uber has changed my life during the day. How did we used to live without it?
Kim: Is there anything you don't like about New York or that you hate?
Jocelyn: No, not yet – nothing! I love New York!

Chloë Sevigny

Chloë Sevigny has been a hardcore downtown New Yorker since the day she graduated high school and moved here. I first met her in the 1990s when we shot her in Washington Square Park for *Paper*, modelling Kim Gordon's clothing line, at the time called X-Girl. In those days, Chloë was part of the young street-skate posse hanging out in the downtown streets and parks that Larry Clark's classic New York film *Kids* focused on. Decades later, Chloë has evolved into one of our more famous downtown hometown girls with a major acting career, in classics like Whit Stillman's *The Last Days of Disco* and Jim Jarmusch's *The Dead Don't Die*. The difference is that, while continuing to act in successful films and TV shows, she's remained firmly part of New York's art and underground cultural community. Her climb has been intuitive and far from an LA-type career path. She's a tried-and-true New Yorker – and she is *busy*. When I asked her what she was up to at the moment the first thing on her list was 'trying to figure out how to discipline a small child' (her son is now hitting two years old). She is also finishing up a short film she directed that was written by and stars John Epperson, aka Lipsinka, called *Toxic Femininity*. Plus, to top it off, she is gearing up to play the role of the legendary waspy blond socialite C.Z. Guest for the second season of the FX series *Feud*, based on the book *Capote's Women*, or as he liked to call them, 'swans'. It promises to be another glimpse of uptown moneyed women during the late 20th century in, you guessed it, New York City. While I see Chloë every so often in the hood, it was fun to catch up properly.

Baguette Re-edition sheepskin and leather bag, windbreaker, knitted socks, and leather ankle boots.

Kim Hastreiter: Chloë, where did you grow up?
Chloë Sevigny: I grew up in Darien, Connecticut, but I moved to New York City in 1993, the day after I graduated from high school.
Kim: Why did you come here so definitively?
Chloë: I'd grown up coming into the city. My father commuted to the city every day – we lived only 45 minutes away – so it always seemed very close, but just out of reach. I came in with him often, and I was seduced from a very young age by the bright lights and big city. Then, of course, as a teen there were limitless things that appealed to me – the people, the places, the parks.
Kim: You were hanging out in Washington Square, skating in those days, right?
Chloë: I wasn't skating! But I was hanging out with skaters. I'd go shop at Love Saves the Day,[1] and eat at Kiev, in the East Village.[2]
Kim: When you came here straight from high school, where did you live? Did you have a job?
Chloë: I worked at Liquid Sky,[3] and I lived in an apartment in Brooklyn Heights with five other kids who all worked for Peter Gatien, who owned the Limelight club.[4] I would also do odd jobs. I did the coat check at rave clubs and sometimes worked standing on line for scalpers to buy tickets at Madison Square Garden. You'd have to stand in line overnight to be one of the first to buy. You could only get a certain amount. I did a lot of odd jobs like that.
Kim: Were you like a raver in those days?
Chloë: I was kind of into everything. I was more into the indie rock scene; I was more into X-Girl. I modelled for them.[5]
Kim: That was our first picture of you in *Paper*, for X-Girl. Kim Gordon was on our cover! The issue was called 'Pussy Power'. You were a kid!
Chloë: I was their fit model; I was also Kim's babysitter. I lived a block from them on Jersey Avenue and Lafayette. That was my second New York apartment.
Kim: Where do you live now?
Chloë: West SoHo.
Kim: Why do you still live in New York? Are you still in love with it?
Chloë: I'm definitely still in love with it. It never occurred to me to leave. Where would I go? I have no idea. Also, truth be told, my father passed away when I was 20, and I never wanted to be far from my mother who stayed in Connecticut.
Kim: Why is New York better than other places?
Chloë: I think it's the energy, the pace, the geography, the arts, the food, and how accessible everything is here. It's 24/7.
Kim: Why do you think people come here to live from other places?
Chloë: I'm not sure because I've seen a lot of douchebags here recently. As far as I'm concerned all the Lululemon girls can get out of here, just get on a bus and leave! I don't need them here.
Kim: New Yorkers work so hard, but how do you relax?
Chloë: I like vintage shopping.
Kim: Thrift stores?
Chloë: Thrifting is dead; it's tragic.
Kim: What is your favourite part of New York these days.
Chloë: I'm kind of going back to Washington Square a lot, weirdly. Like during the pandemic, it was lit.
Kim: That's my backyard; I live on that park. I actually set up an outdoor office on a bench there during the pandemic. I ran into you there one time when I was taking a meeting!
Chloë: I also like discovering new parks with my son, Vanja, and my husband, Siniša. We try to go to new parks every weekend now.
Kim: In Manhattan or Brooklyn?
Chloë: Both, first we were doing all the merry-go-rounds, the one in Central Park, then in Brooklyn, in Battery Park. I mean now everyone is up in arms about what's going on at East River, but we're like, maybe it's worth it, because they've done a really great job with the other parks.
Kim: What is your favourite New York City street?
Chloë: I used to live on East 10th. That's pretty special round there; I have so many memories from living on that street.
Kim: What is your favourite mode of transport in New York City?
Chloë: The subway, without hesitation.
Kim: Your favourite New York City music?
Chloë: Velvet Underground.
Kim: What's your favourite New York food?
Chloë: Mamoun's Falafel.
Kim: Oh my God, me, too! I met the owner once. On MacDougal Street. I felt like I was meeting a movie star. I've been hitting Mamoun's for decades. It turns out he owns a bunch of buildings and is Keith McNally's landlord at Minetta Tavern. Keith's son Harry introduced me to him. So who is the most famous person you ever saw in New York?
Chloë: I saw Joe DiMaggio at Ray's Pizza. The original Ray's; it's not there any more.
Kim: Wow, that's a good one! What's your favourite New York City movie?
Chloë: Can I say one of my own?
Kim: Sure!
Chloë: *The Last Days of Disco*.
Kim: I assume you're going to stick around in New York City?
Chloë: Yeah! I'm buying the apartment next door to me to enlarge. I'm digging in! New York forever!

'The most famous New Yorker I ever saw was Joe DiMaggio. It was in Ray's Pizza. But in the original Ray's, the one that's not there any more.'

1. An East Village fixture from 1966 until its closure in 2009, Loves Saves the Day was, according to *New York* magazine, a 'boutique-cum-time-capsule' and 'a fixture on the vintage clothing and memorabilia scene'. In a short, undated review of the store, the magazine described its retail offer: 'Smurf and Hulk Hogan action figures are displayed like museum pieces in glass cases, while slightly more contemporary items – a *Melrose Place* CD-ROM, a miniature David Beckham – line the shelves.'

2. Kiev, a Ukrainian restaurant on Second Avenue opened in 1978 and closed in 2000, when, according to the *New York Times*, its owner 'got bored with it'. Beat poet Allen Ginsberg mentioned Kiev in a 1982 poem, as did the band King Missile in their 1992 classic song, 'Detachable Penis'.

3. Founded by Carlos Soul Slinger, a veterinarian-DJ, and designer Claudia Rey and named after the 1982 cult sci-fi New Wave film, Liquid Sky began as a cosmetics brand in São Paulo, Brazil, in 1986. The New York store opened at 482 Broome Street in 1990 (later moving to Lafayette Street) and the 'gallery style retail concept' became a key location for rave culture in New York, selling original clothing, including T-shirts with Astrogirl, an alien with a heart-shaped crotch, and oversized jeans, as well as records, cosmetics and jewellery. Sevigny began working in the store in 1993; Liquid Sky closed in 1999.

4. Based in a deconsecrated, 19th-century Episcopalian church at 656 Avenue of the Americas and owned by nightlife impresario Peter Gatien, Limelight was the centre of New York's rave culture (and the 'club kids') in the early 1990s. At its heyday in 1995, it was welcoming 20,000 clubbers a week, before a drug raid shut it down; upon reopening it never recovered its popularity and closed shortly afterwards.

5. Chloë Sevigny's first screen appearance was in the 1993 video for 'Sugar Kane', a single taken from the album *Dirty* by Kim Gordon's band, Sonic Youth. In a November 1994 *New Yorker* portrait of Sevigny, author Jay McInerney wrote that: 'The idea for the video was to do a little parable about the way Seventh Avenue plagiarizes the guerrilla fashion of the street: the Trickle-Up Theory of Fashion, where the Up Haute cops the Down Low.'

Arsun Sorrenti

Another great New York kid on an upward trajectory is Arsun Sorrenti, the son of well-known photographer Mario and lovely artist mother, Mary, who I've known since she was a kid. He's got great DNA for sure. Born and bred in NYC, he may have low-key style, but he has the cool New York hustle and ambition down. So it's no wonder Arsun is gaining recognition for the music he writes, performs and records. Arsun sings beautifully and listening to him it's pretty apparent his hero is Bob Dylan, which he told me is true. He spent a lot of time this past year out on the road, opening for Cat Power. Not bad for a 24-year-old. When not touring, Arsun hangs out in the East Village and sings live at the club owned by his girlfriend's father.

Wool sweater and wool gloves.

Kim Hastreiter: Where were you born?
Arsun Sorrenti: I was born in Tribeca in 1998. Then the World Trade Center happened, so we moved to Riverdale in the Bronx. That is where my family has been living ever since. It is the last stop on the 1 train around Van Cortlandt Park.
Kim: I've known your mother Mary since she was a kid, before you were born. She worked at a rave store called Liquid Sky on Lafayette Street, which was around the corner from *Paper*'s office. Your mom had dreadlocks in those days and was actually on the cover of *Paper* for our 'Pot Is Hot' issue modelling all the pot merchandise that used to be sold on Canal Street in those days. I loved her. Your parents are creatives; your dad is a photographer and your mom an artist and ceramicist. Were they from New York?
Arsun: My dad was born in Italy. My mother's from Louisiana. My dad came here when he was 10 and my mom I think when she was 20.
Kim: What was it like growing up in Riverdale?
Arsun: I didn't know my neighbourhood that well; I just went there to sleep. I went to school at LaGuardia Performing Arts School.[1] Before that I went to a school called Rudolf Steiner. I ended up spending most all my time downtown though.
Kim: Where did you hang out? Where is your tribe?
Arsun: When I was younger I was skating all the time, mostly downtown on the West Side or in Battery Park, and a lot in the East Village. For the last eight years I've probably spent every day in East Village. I actually just got an apartment there.
Kim: What's your favourite part of New York now?
Arsun: Definitely the East Village. I think there are a lot of cool people there, and all my friends live there.
Kim: What is your favourite New York street?
Arsun: I like Avenues A and B, but my favourite street is 9th Street. I like it around Tompkins Square Park; I hang out there a lot.
Kim: Why do you think New York is better than other places?
Arsun: There are so many different things going on in New York. You can pick whatever you want to do, and try to do it. You can also walk everywhere, which is really nice and there are great parks. I've been to a lot of other places on tour in America and Europe, and I still love coming home. It's like a breath of fresh air to return. I also like that I can go to a deli or a shop and get food or whatever at any time of day or night. Everything I might feel like doing is just a little walk or bike or train away. It's easy to get around in New York. But it could just be that I grew up here. I feel like a lot of people lately don't come to New York to live because it's really expensive. The cheap taco places are like $20 for a couple of tacos now. It's crazy.
Kim: Do you have a lot of friends who grew up here?
Arsun: Most all them grew up here.
Kim: I'm not surprised because it's hard for young people to move here because it's gotten so pricey. How do young people come here these days if you are not from here?
Arsun: A lot of my friends have roommates who they share places with. Some of them live in different parts of Brooklyn or wherever in the city.
Kim: Are you feeling a good young creative energy vibe in New York these days?

'My all-time favourite musician is Bob Dylan, but I have a lot of musician friends. You can tell in their lyrics they're writing about New York.'

Arsun: Yeah, totally, all my friends are creative and active. I am writing songs all the time and doing music. When I'm not touring, I sing and play songs that I write at my girlfriend's dad's club in the East Village. It's called Nublu and is a really great place.[2]
Kim: What does your girlfriend do? Did you know her growing up here?
Arsun: She does a whole range of creative things, photography, video. I met her when I was in high school at LaGuardia and we've been together since then.
Kim: Do you have a lot of friends who are like you and grew up with arty parents?
Arsun: I have lots of different friends, but one of my closest friends, Atticus, had parents who were also artists, actually in the East Village. His mom is a filmmaker and his father, who just passed away, was a visual artist who did 3D art; he was a really cool guy. But I also have a bunch of different friends from everywhere who came here from a lot of different places.
Kim: What is your favourite New York music other than your own?
Arsun: My all-time favourite musician is Bob Dylan, but I have a lot of musician friends who are cool and doing different things. You can tell in some of their lyrics they are talking about New York.
Kim: What's your favourite mode of NYC transportation?
Arsun: Growing up, I'd get the train downtown, then skate to wherever I wanted to go. Then Citi Bike[3] came around, so that is what I use now.
Kim: Do you see yourself staying here? You are a New Yorker, tried and true!
Arsun: I couldn't imagine living anywhere else; I love it here.
Kim: Good, I am glad, because we need people like you here.

1. Founded in 1936 as the High School of Music & Art and joined by the School of Performing Arts in 1948, the Fiorello H. LaGuardia High School of Music & Art and Performing Arts was given the name of its founder in 1969. Since 1984, the school has been based at 100 Amsterdam Avenue, just behind Lincoln Center. Its alumni include actors Jennifer Aniston, Al Pacino, and Timothée Chalamet, writers Hilton Als, Erica Jong, and Jonathan Lethem, and musicians Eartha Kitt, Slick Rick, and Liza Minnelli. The school, which currently has just over 3,000 students, was the basis for Alan Parker's 1980s film *Fame* and the subsequent television series that ran from 1982 to 1987.

2. Opened in 2002 by Swedish-Turkish saxophonist Ilhan Ersahin, Nublu Club specializes in a combination of jazz, African, South American, Caribbean, electronic, and dance music. Since 2005, the club has also had its own record label. The *New York Times* called the club an 'incubator of musical talent, with some of the most adventurous and varied offerings in the city'.

3. Since the service was launched in May 2013, Citi Bikes have been used over 100 million times. The bike-rental system, which is now available in four of the city's five boroughs and Hoboken and Jersey City in New Jersey, now has over 1,600 bike stations. According to a January 2022 article in the *New Yorker*, two men, Scott Ambinder and Erick Finkelstein, both claim to have docked a bike at all of them.

'It's not a bag, it's a Baguette!'

Patricia Field

Patricia Field is a true New York fashion mother. Her shop on East 8th Street in Greenwich Village was the stuff of legends. So many stories. Like the time in the late 1970s when Keith Haring did the windows or when Jean-Michel Basquiat followed suit and sold his new line of clothes there. Or that time when Jean Paul Gaultier went shopping in the store and spied a pair of Andre Walker's genius 'pantyskirts', only to appropriate them into his next collection (the kids went nuts and not in a good way; we all protested big time). Then there was the time when Stephen Sprouse declared bankruptcy and Pat convinced the Hasidic job-lot-bankruptcy-schmatte salesmen to hold the bankruptcy sale in her store. Once again, the kids went wild (this time in a good way) because everything was *so cheap*! Pat loved that because the kids all loved Sprouse, but it was always too expensive for them, so she saw it as a way to 'give back' to them. I bought so much stuff at that sale! Patricia Field the woman and Patricia Field the store were the centre of the New York City universe for downtown kids between 1972 and 2002. That was only the beginning. When she closed the store in 2002, she had already begun to do the styling for a little TV show called *Sex and the City*, which then became a monster hit, as well as the rage for fashionistas. It had Pat's crazy style fingerprints all over it. I can't wait to read Pat's new memoir – *Pat in the City* – which comes out later this year. There's so much more, but you'll have to order the book to find out the rest. It was so fun to catch up with her about her love for our fair city.

Hair: Aimi Osada, Tamas Tuzes. Make-up: Aimi Osada, Diek Page, Janessa Paré. Nails: Frances Liang. Photography post-production: Two Three Two

Sequin and leather Baguette bag, vest, and leather clogs.

Kim Hastreiter: Pat! Long time no see! So tell me, were you born in New York?
Patricia Field: Yes! I was born in New York Hospital on the Upper East Side. My parents lived on East 76th Street.
Kim: What did your parents do?
Patricia: They had a dry-cleaning store on 3rd Avenue and 74th Street.
Kim: Did you grow up on the Upper East Side?
Patricia: Yeah, until my family bought a house in Whitestone, Queens. Then I went to Flushing High School. After that I went to NYU.
Kim: A tried and true New Yorker! Which neighbourhood do you live in right now?
Patricia: Lower East Side.
Kim: You used to live right near me on 8th Street above your legendary store.
Patricia: Right, always near NYU.
Kim: You've always been a downtown girl. Did you hang out in Washington Square Park when you were young?
Patricia: Not really. My first experience in Washington Square Park was when I went to college at NYU. I studied government and philosophy there.
Kim: Where was your first apartment?
Patricia: It was at 14 Washington Place, which is just east of Washington Square Park. That's where I opened up my first little store in the early 1970s.
Kim: What did you sell there?
Patricia: Fashion!
Kim: So you studied government and philosophy and then went and opened up a fashion store?
Patricia: Yeah, because I knew the traffic patterns of the girls who were going from building to building, I knew that whole area, and opened up my store right on Washington Place.
Kim: So the students were your customers?
Patricia: Exactly!
Kim: You have business smarts in your DNA! Forget government and philosophy!
Patricia: Yeah, I grew up that way. I like retail.
Kim: When you eventually opened your incredible shop on 8th Street you literally became the centre of the universe for all the downtown creative style and art kids of New York. Because I lived around the corner I was there constantly. It was like a party there every day. I mean, Pat, you did it all; you were really the hub of the downtown style. You always supported the wild and often unruly young kids from Andre Walker to Stephen Sprouse. Including us! You used to advertise in *Paper*! Everyone who came to visit New York from around the world always stopped in to see your magic. You really did it, Pat!
Patricia: And you did it, too, girl!
Kim: I know, but I followed in your footsteps. Pat Field on 8th Street was the best, craziest store and it really had heart! Did you ever have thoughts of leaving New York?
Patricia: Never.
Kim: Why do you think New York is better than every place else?
Patricia: It has the most to offer, culturally – and the people! It's the life I grew up with, so I guess I just like it.
Kim: Why do you think people come here to live from other places? When you had your store, not all the people who worked for you were born-and-bred New Yorkers, they came from other places, right? There's a certain type that comes to New York.
Patricia: I think there is a magic about New York when you don't live here. That's a big draw. The life of New York is unlike anywhere else.

'I worked for Alexander's department store in the South Bronx, which is no longer there. I started as a department manager and then I became a buyer.'

Kim: Also professionally, people come here who are ambitious. You know that New Yorkers work harder than anyone else. I mean, it's fucking hard here. We all worked our asses off.
Patricia: I guess it's hard here, but as I was born here, and grew up here… you know, it's my home town.
Kim: How do you relax?
Patricia: I go out. I go to the clubs. I see my friends. These days I go more to restaurants with friends.
Kim: What do you think of New York City these days? Is it good, is it bad?
Patricia: Well, you know, it's lost some things, but frankly I really like where I live these days. I live in a co-op apartment that I bought; I am high in the sky and have a beautiful view of the river and sky. I am very happy here; I like this neighbourhood. It is very old New York in a way. It started out as a Jewish neighbourhood and still has a lot of Jewish people here.
Kim: But also Hispanic, right?
Patricia: Yeah, and also Asian, mostly Chinese. It's good. It used to be a little low down, but now you know it's like Trader Joes, and blah blah blah.
Kim: Were you at the Fendi show here in New York?
Patricia: Yeah, I was.
Kim: Silvia Fendi really credits you with helping the Baguette blast off. Especially when Sarah Jessica Parker had it in that *Sex in the City* episode. Silvia spoke so nicely about you and her experience loaning you clothes for the show.
Patricia: Really?
Kim: You've had stores, you've styled films and major TV shows. What was the craziest job you ever had looking back?
Patricia: I once went to work for Alexander's department store[1] in the South Bronx, which is no longer there. I started out as a manager of a department and then I became a buyer.
Kim: You are a true retail queen!
Patricia: Right now, I have a gallery of fashion called Patricia Field ArtFashion Gallery. You should come and visit.
Kim: Where is it?
Patricia: It's on East Broadway, right around the corner from where I live. The clothes are mainly one of a kind. You know, it's not commercial.
Kim: The story of our lives! Can you pay the rent? Are you breaking even?
Patricia: Yeah, thank God I am OK financially. I don't have that pressure.
Kim: What makes you happy on the streets of New York?
Patricia: I just take New York for granted. I was born here; I grew up here. It's my home. And I love this home. I love the culture, the people, the lifestyle. It's perfect for me.
Kim: What is your favourite New York mode of transportation.
Patricia: My car! But it depends where I'm going. If it's places where there is no parking, I'll Uber.
Kim: Ever since I've known you you've always had the best cars. Is it a convertible?
Patricia: Yes! It's a 2002 T-bird.
Kim: What colour?
Patricia: Aqua.
Kim: Of course, it is. Nobody has a car in New York City. Many New Yorkers don't even know how to drive. The $64,000 New York question is, 'Where do you park it?'
Patricia: I park it in the garage is in my building. Oh my God, that is vital.
Kim: Is there anything you hate about New York?
Patricia: Not a thing. I love New York.
Kim: And New York loves you Pat!

1. Alexander's department stores were founded in the Bronx in 1928 and sold a variety of affordable fashion items, including unsold stock and reproductions of expensive European clothing. In September 1960, Christian Dior demanded that Alexander's advertising stop using its name to promote the store's copied designs; in response, George Farkas, the store's irascible founder, continued but changed Dior to 'Monsieur X'. When asked why, he replied that it was 'just to annoy them because they are annoying us.' The last Alexander's stores closed in 1992.

Special thanks: Shelley Durkan, Nicky Elder, Cristiana Monfardini, Hugo Scott, Shea Spencer.

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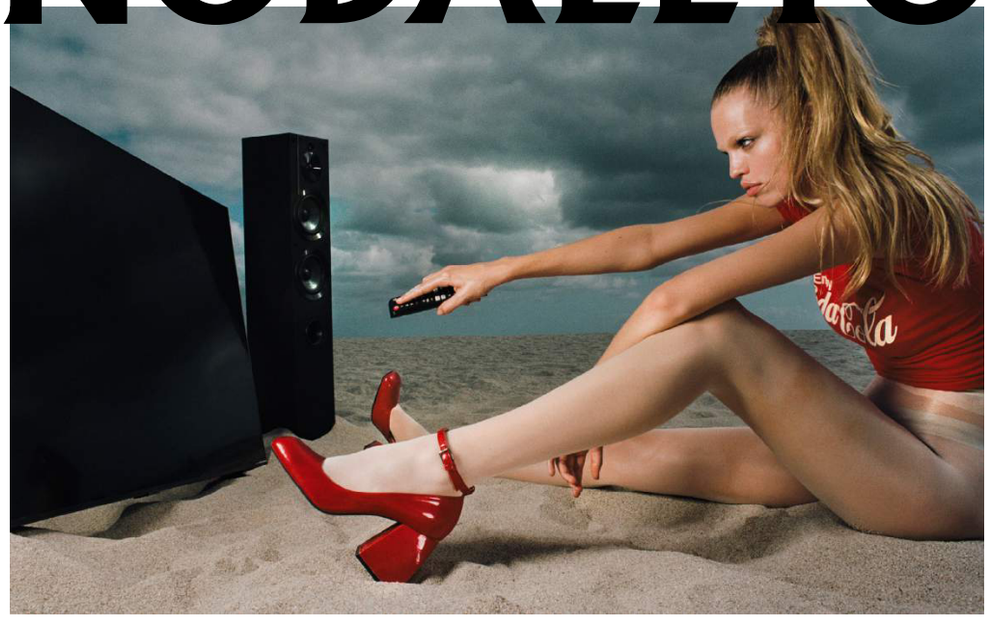

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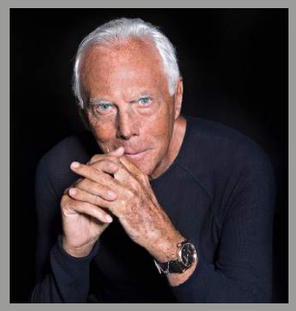

The Life-Lessons Questionnaire: Giorgio Armani

By Loïc Prigent

What's the life lesson you wish you had known at 20?
I wish I'd known that you can, and indeed you have to, make mistakes; it is the only way to grow and evolve.

What is your most extravagant possession?
A pair of zebras on my estate in Broni and a resin gorilla named Uri in my Milan studio. I think other people would certainly call them extravagant.

Who is the best fashion journalist ever?
I can't answer that without alienating all the other journalists, so I choose a non-living Italian journalist who taught so many how to observe the world and fashion with a clear and lucid gaze: Camilla Cederna. True, she dealt more with costume than with fashion, but her eye was unforgettable and her judgement still resonates today. Of all the industry experts, I choose my dear friend Giusi Ferré whose recent death saddened me greatly.

What present can I give to the friend who has everything?
Without meaning to sound pretentious, I would say that the most beautiful gift we can give to the people we love is our time. And I don't mean the usual indifferent or distracted attention but intense and authentic human exchange; it might only be a few minutes, but that's real quality time.

What's your favourite time of year?
My favourite time of year is summer, without a doubt. The long, bright days have such an invigorating effect, and I love the sea, too.

What's the life lesson you wish you'd known at 40?
At 40, I wish I had known that the higher you climb, the more your responsibilities increase. Success is not just a matter of notoriety, but also of commitment to others and great responsibility.

What's your favourite painting?
Giorgio Morandi's still lifes are among my favourite paintings, because of their mellow, delicate colours and because they manage to convey such deep feelings and sensations despite only being collections of bottles and solid objects. Katsushika Hokusai's *The Great Wave off Kanagawa* is another work that I admire very much and which unites two of my great passions: Japanese prints, which have often inspired me in my collections, and the sea.

What makes a good men's suit today?
For me, it is the perfect blend of soft tailoring and lines that accompany the body without forcing it. There can be no elegance without naturalness.

Where is the ideal house?
The ideal home for me is on an island, with a view of the sea.

What's on your mood board these days?
The same as always: men and women with character.

What are you most proud of professionally?
What I've built and the fact that my work speaks to people, that it elicits a reaction. My book *Per Amore* was recently published and I decided to sign some copies at a public event. The crowd showed me such deep affection that I was truly moved.

What do you wish you had been told sooner?
I wish I'd been told that youth doesn't last forever, but equally that youth isn't the only thing of value.

What's the life lesson you wish you'd known at 60?
That retirement is a utopian concept.

What's your favourite dance?
I don't like being the centre of attention, so I've never really liked dancing. But I do enjoy watching friends having a carefree time, especially Leo, my right-hand man and trusted friend, who has a spontaneous and natural elegance when he dances. I'm also fond of classical ballet and recently I appreciated *Chéri*, choreographed by Roland Petit, during the Gala Carla Fracci, a tribute that Teatro alla Scala dedicated to the great etoile who passed away recently.

Photograph: Stefano Guindani/SGP.

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